The Story of the Williams Mill in Pontiac, Illinois

Dale C. Maley

THE STORY OF THE WILLIAMS MILL IN PONTIAC, ILLINOIS

by

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1
Book Design

Chapter 2
1830 to 1854

Chapter 3
1855 to 1923

Chapter 4
1924 to 1954

Chapter 5
1955

Chapter 6
1956 to 1961

Chapter 7
Miscellaneous Photos and Paintings of Williams Mill

Chapter 8
Closing Thoughts

References
Recommended Reading
Websites
Author Spotlight

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Foreword

For more than a century, the Williams Mill stood beside the Vermilion River as one of Pontiac's most recognizable landmarks. Generations of residents crossed the Mill Street bridge and passed the towering wooden structure on their way to work, school, church, or downtown shopping. Although the mill disappeared in the devastating fire of 1955, it has never disappeared from Pontiac's collective memory.

This book traces the history of the Williams Mill from the earliest sawmill built in 1838 through its development into one of Livingston County's best-known flour and feed mills. Using historic newspapers, Sanborn Insurance maps, photographs, postcards, paintings, and county history books, this book reconstructs the story of the people who built, operated, and preserved the memory of this remarkable landmark.

The Williams Mill was more than simply a place where grain was ground into flour. It reflected the growth of Pontiac itself—from a frontier settlement surrounded by timber, to a thriving agricultural community, and eventually to a modern city. The mill witnessed changing technology as water wheels gave way to steam engines, electricity, and perhaps even internal water turbines. In its later years, it also became a gathering place for artists, fishermen, and local residents who remembered it with great affection.

Although many questions about the mill have now been answered, a few mysteries remain. Historical research is never truly finished, and future discoveries may reveal additional details about the construction, machinery, and operation of the Williams Mill. It is my hope that this book preserves what is currently known while encouraging others to continue exploring Pontiac's rich history.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks go to the Livingston County Historical Society for use of historical artifacts contained in the collections archives.

Thanks go to Judith Wells for proofreading the manuscript.

CHAPTER 1

Book Design

Sanborn Maps

The Sanborn Insurance Company periodically made maps of many small towns in Central Illinois. Sanborn maps still exist for Pontiac in the years of 1888, 1892, 1897, 1903, 1910, and 1924. Copies of these old maps are available for free from several different websites. The Williams Mill is shown on all six of these maps.

Newspaper Stories

All newspaper stories cited in this book will be presented in the original wording of the article. If the copy of the article had adequate quality, it may be shown as an image. If the article is of poor visual quality, it will be transcribed into text.

Pantagraph Negatives

Starting a few years ago, the Pantagraph released their old photo negatives to the McLean County Museum of History. The museum had the negatives scanned and then posted on a website where anyone can access them for free. Negatives that were used in this book will be referred to as "Pantagraph negatives."

Archive. Org

Most of the rare documents discovered in researching this book have been uploaded to Archive. Org. Hopefully, this website will survive for many years in the future, and future researchers can easily find this material. A PDF copy of this book will also be eventually uploaded to Archive. Org.

Book Font

This book is written in Times New Roman with a 12 point font size. This relatively large font size makes all parts of the book easy to read.

Transcripts of newspaper articles will be indented in the main body of the book.

AI (Artificial Intelligence)

AI programs were used to help write this book. An AI program was used to help transcribe the newspaper articles from images into text. Other AI programs were used to enhance old and faded photographs from newspapers. AI programs were also used to help create historic images. Some of the AI programs used were Perplexity, ChatGPT, and Fotor.com.

Chronological Chapters

This book is designed in chronological order to make it easier to follow the story of the Williams Mill.

Spelling of Sawmill

Newspapers and other sources often spell sawmill as “saw mill” or “saw-mill”. I standardized the spelling in this book to be sawmill.

CHAPTER 2

1830 to 1854

Native Americans

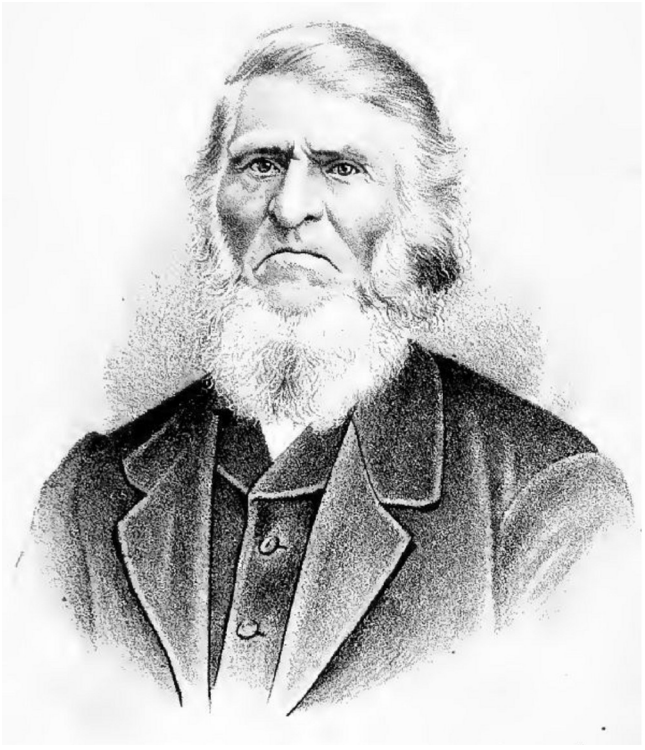
Before 1830, the Kickapoo were the most recent Native American tribe to live in Livingston County. From 1828 to 1830, a Kickapoo tribe with 650 members lived about six miles south of present-day Fairbury on what is now called Indian Creek.

In 1830, this tribe moved about ten miles east to a location about three miles south of present-day Chatsworth, Illinois. The Black Hawk War lasted for about five months in 1832. The Kickapoo created no problems for the early white settlers in Livingston County during this short war. After the war ended, we forced to the Kickapoo to leave the State of Illinois.

Today, there are about 5,000 descendants of the Kickapoo tribe. They now live in Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and Mexico.

First White Settlers in Livingston County

The first white settlers in Livingston County were Valentine and Rachel Darnall. They built a log cabin and settled on what is now Indian Creek, about 6 miles south of present day Fairbury.



Valentine Martin Darnall and his wife Rachel Steers. They were the first pioneer settlers in Livingston County in 1830.

About the time the Kickapoo were moving from south of Fairbury to south of Chatsworth, the Kickapoo gave the Darnall family some beans they had grown. These beans proved to be a vital food source for the Darnall family because the Winter of 1830 was one of the most severe winters ever recorded in Illinois history.

The William McDowell family arrived and settled north of Fairbury in 1832. They brought some glass panes with them to make windows in their new log cabin. The McDowells needed some planed wood to make the window frames to hold the glass. They discovered that the Kickapoo tribe had made some boards using the hand hewn process. The Kickapoo agreed to trade their hand hewn boards for a small supply of ammunition.

Massive Timber Groves Along the Vermilion River

Many of the townships in Livingston County were first surveyed in the mid 1830s. For example, Avoca Township, southeast of Pontiac, was surveyed in 1834. These surveyors recorded the types of trees growing along the Vermilion and they included oak, hickory, burr oak, hackberry, linn, buckeye, elm, sugar tree, black oak, walnut, ash, white oak, and mulberry.

Today, a linn tree is usually called an American Basswood species.

These surveyors noted that timber grew anywhere from a quarter to a half-mile wide on either side of the Vermilion River. These were old and mature trees that could be cut down for lumber if a sawmill had existed in that era.

No Sawmills or Grist Mills in the 1830s

Because no sawn lumber was available, the pioneer settlers in Livingston County had to build their first homes as log cabins.

These pioneer farmers also had no easy way of milling up their grains into flour. They had to transport their grain fifty miles, with an ox team, to a mill owned and run by John Green, on the other side of Ottawa. After hauling it that distance, they frequently had to wait a day or two for their turn. It almost never happened that a man went to mill, called round by the post office to check his mail, and then return home on the same day.

There are also examples of other early pioneer farmers hauling their grain all the way to Chicago to get it milled. Chicago is about 100 miles from Livingston County.

Livingston County Formed in 1837

When Livingston County was formed in 1837, Pontiac was chosen as the county seat. Pontiac had very few inhabitants, but it had a prime location on the Vermilion River. Large stands of old timber growth were available to built new houses and stores if the river could be dammed and a sawmill built.

The 1878 Livingston County history book story about how the county was formed is shown below.

> On the 26th of July, 1837, forty-one years prior to the present writing, in accordance with this arrangement, the town of Pontiac was surveyed and platted by Isaac Whitcher, County Surveyor of Livingston County, for "Henry Weed, Lucius W. Young and Seth M. Young, from the southeast quarter of Section 22 and part of the northeast quarter of the same."
>
> The Court House Square, the Jail lot, six acres reserved for mill purposes, with all the streets as they now appear, were all designated. This, then, was the nucleus, the germ, the foundation of the first town in the county, and whose existence is co-eval with that of the county itself; and, though outranked in antiquity as a settlement, is the point from which, in a measure, has emanated and grown all of its institutions. Settlements have been made, roads and other public improvements have been established, and locations have been selected, with regard to their connection with the county seat.
>
> By the time of which we speak, about a half dozen families had settled in what are now the bounds of Pontiac Township.

The passage above from the 1878 history book specifies that six acres be reserved for mill purposes.

Among the key infrastructure needed by the new county included a courthouse, a jail, a bridge across the Vermilion River, a sawmill, and a grist mill.

First Sawmill Built in 1838 in Pontiac

In 1838, the first sawmill in Pontiac was erected by C. H. Perry and James McKee. A grist mill was not added to this sawmill until some years later.

James McKee was from Joliet and in 1832 he built the first flour mill in Joliet.

The first sawmill almost certainly required a small dam to divert water into the mill race. Later records indicate Thomas Williams replaced the original log dam with a more substantial stone dam in 1881.

Lumber Needed to Build the First Livingston County Court House

The 1878 history book recounts the building of the first court house.

> On the 3d day of December, 1839, the County Commissioners entered into a contract with the proprietor of the town for the erection of a Court House, to be 22x30 feet, two stories high; to be built and completed within twelve months after "there is sufficient rise in the Vermillion River to allow the proprietor's of the sawmill to put said mill in operation." When completed, the Commissioners were to cancel and deliver up the bond which had been given for the location of the county seat.

The need for a courthouse for the new county drove the need to build a sawmill on the Vermilion River to saw the wood needed to build the new courthouse.

It is interesting to note that in 1839, just like today, the Vermilion River has dramatically different water levels within a given year and from year to year. The contract issued to build the new Court House had a clause saying the Vermilion River must have enough water to operate the new sawmill.

The Railroad Arrives in 1854

For about 15 years after the first sawmill was built, Pontiac continued to grow in population. The sawmill on the Vermilion River provided the boards need to build new businesses and residential housing.

In 1854, the Chicago & Mississippi Railroad (later the Chicago & Alton Railroad) reached Pontiac. It was the first railroad to be built in Livingston County. Pontiac was selected as a watering and wooding station for steam locomotives.

The arrival of the railroad transformed Pontiac from a small frontier county seat into a rapidly growing commercial center. The sawmill originally built by Perry & McKee supplied large quantities of lumber and firewood for the railroad. Water from the Vermilion River was also pumped into a tower to supply steam locomotives.

In 1857, the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad laid its tracks from Peoria east to the Indiana border. Livingston County was then very well connected to the nationwide railroad transportation system. Farmers and businesses could ship their products to nationwide markets.

The sawmill on the Vermilion was able to ship lumber to many other national markets instead of just serving Livingston County customers.

Two Pontiac Historic Homes Likely Built with Lumber from the Vermilion River Sawmill

There are only two pre-Civil War homes still standing in Livingston County. The 1858 Jones House at 314 East Madison Street is the oldest brick home in Pontiac. The 1854 Strevell House at 401 West Livingston Street is known for hosting Abraham Lincoln for one day in 1860. Both of these homes are on the National Register of Historic Places. Both homes are open monthly for free public tours.

At the Strevell House, some parts of the home were intentionally not refurbished so allow visitors to see the type of lumber used to build this home. The wood studs used to frame this house are much larger than today's two-by-fours. The wood sheeting used to line the inside of the home are one inch thick and often 18 inch wide boards. Today, you can not easily buy lumber wider than about 12 inches.

CHAPTER 3

1855 to 1923

Thomas Williams (1823-1904)

Thomas Williams and his son Roger Williams owned and operated the Williams Mill for almost 100 years. The September 22, 1904 obituary for Thomas Williams from the Pontiac Leader newspaper is shown below.

THOMAS WILLIAMS, THE MILLER, DEAD
Death Due to Infirmities of Age—Was a Pioneer of this County.

Thomas Williams, one of Pontiac's pioneer citizens, died at his home on Water street this morning, after a long illness, death being due to old age and general break down.

He was born in Benbeigshire, Wales, October 9, 1823, spending his young manhood among the crags of that cliff-bound island. At the age of 21, in 1843, he sailed for this country. On arriving here he settled at Utica, New York, where he attended school and learned to speak the English language.

In 1854 he came to Illinois and this county. On arriving in this county the only occupation which afforded him work was that of farming and he hired his services to W. P. Babcock, who resided at what is now Babcock's grove, north of this city. Babcock was a strong abolitionist and Mr. Williams had the opportunity of viewing some stirring scenes about his home at that time.

He remained in the employment of Mr. Babcock for some time, leaving there to work for J. W. Remick in 1854, who was then conducting what was known as Rudd's mill several miles down the river. He worked for him some time as miller and in 1857 purchased the Corey's Mill, a mill located on the site where his present mill stands. This was torn down in course of time and a much larger one erected. This burned to the ground in 1891 and was replaced by the present one.

Mr. Williams was married in 1864 to Miss Martha Toomer, of Clinton, Oneida county, New York, to which union eight children were born, one dying in infancy. Those living are: Mrs. Belle Stark, of Carthage, Mo.; Mrs. Lizzie Skinner, of Missoula, Mont.; Misses Anna, Gertrude and Grace at home; Miss Lois, at Topeka, Kas., and Roger, at home.

For the past year or more Mr. Williams had been failing in health, but had not been confined to his bed. His son, Roger, attended to the mill, but Mr. Williams kept an oversight, being able to be about some of the time. About ten days ago he attended a meeting of the directors of the Livingston County National Bank, he being one of them, and appeared in good spirits. He was up as usual this morning but grew suddenly weak and went to his room. In a short time he passed away sitting in his chair.

Mr. Williams was a staunch and faithful member of the Christian church and reared his family in the faith. He was a man highly respected—one who followed the even channel of his way doing good without being heralded with a blare of trumpets, setting an example of strict integrity, and Christian fortitude to all the world.

The time of the funeral has not been set, awaiting the arrival of the three daughters from the west.

How Did Thomas Williams Learn the Milling Trade?

From his obituary, he worked for J. W. Remick at his mill from about 1854 to 1857. Mr. Remick operated Rudd's mill located several miles down the Vermilion River from Pontiac.

J. W. Remick came from Pennsylvania, and, after arriving in this part of the county, followed the trade of **miller** for several years. In 1856, he was elected Sheriff of the county, in which capacity he served two years. After two years, during which time he was engaged in farming, he was elected to the office of Circuit Clerk, serving as such officer for eight years.

When Did Thomas Williams Buy the Pontiac Mill on the Vermilion River?

According to his obituary, he bought the mill in 1857. It was known as Corey's Mill when he bought it. Thomas Williams was 34 years of age when he bought this mill.

Thomas Williams Replaced Old Mill with New Mill in 1867

According to a November 20, 1891, Pontiac Sentinel newspaper article, Thomas Williams decided to build a new mill in 1867. According to this article, his new mill was an immense structure 50×75 feet—the main part—with an annex containing an engine room and sawmill. It was three stories high with a basement. Over 600,000 feet of lumber were used in constructing it and the internal works. It was fitted up with a complete line of machinery such as was used in the time it was built.

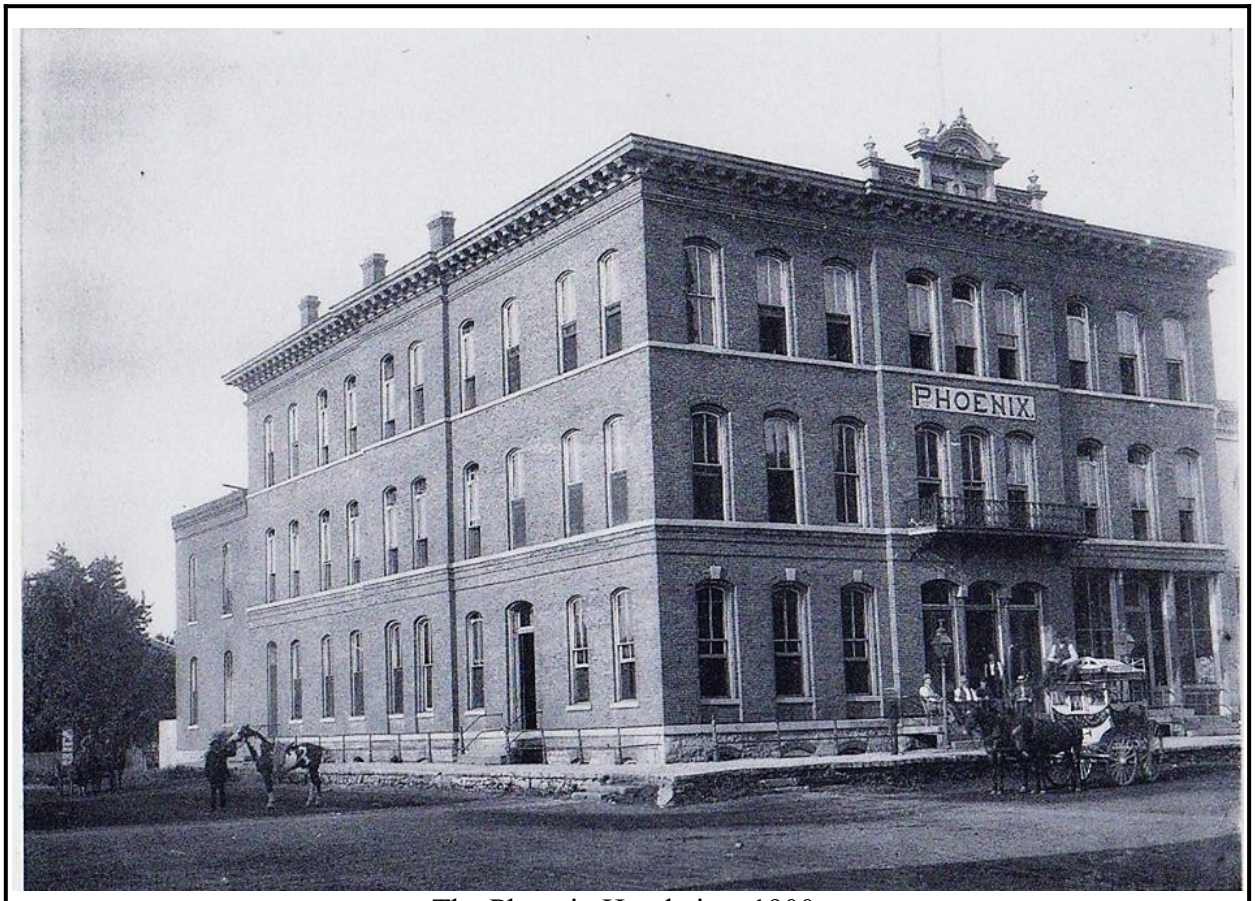
Thomas Williams Becomes Prominent Pontiac Businessman

The Williams Mill was very successful and Thomas Williams became a well-known and successful Pontiac businessman.

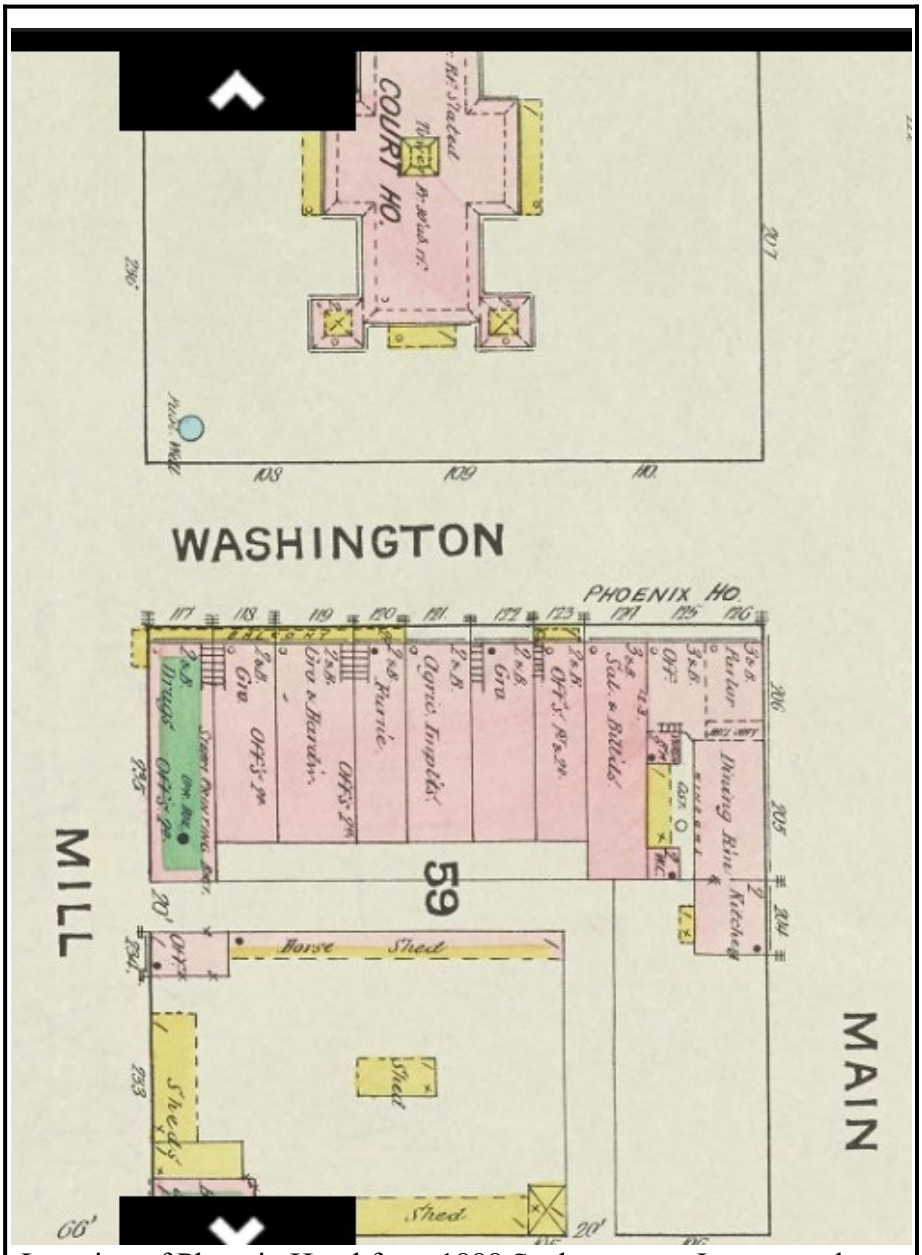
The 1909 Livingston County history book recounts that Thomas Williams played a key role in the expansion of Pontiac in the 1870s as shown below.

> During the years 1872-73 Pontiac took a sudden boom as regards the building of substantial business blocks. Prior to that time the business buildings around the square were all, with one exception, constructed of wood, with a large portico in front reaching to the end of the sidewalk. These were destroyed by fire or moved away to make room for larger and more commodious brick buildings, which were constructed during this time.
>
> What was most needed at this time was a good hotel, and at a meeting of the citizens called for that purpose, Thomas Williams and Stephen C. Crane made a proposition to erect a substantial three-story brick building providing the citizens would raise a donation of $4,000. This was done in one day and Messrs. Crane and Williams at once started the erection of the Phoenix hotel. It was completed and ready for occupancy on October 1, 1873, and cost, furnished, nearly $40,000.

The $40,000 cost of the Phoenix Hotel in 1873 is equivalent to $1.1 million in today's dollars.



The Phoenix Hotel circa 1900.



Location of Phoenix Hotel from 1888 Sanborn map. It was southeast of the old Court House.

Robust Stone Dam Built in 1881

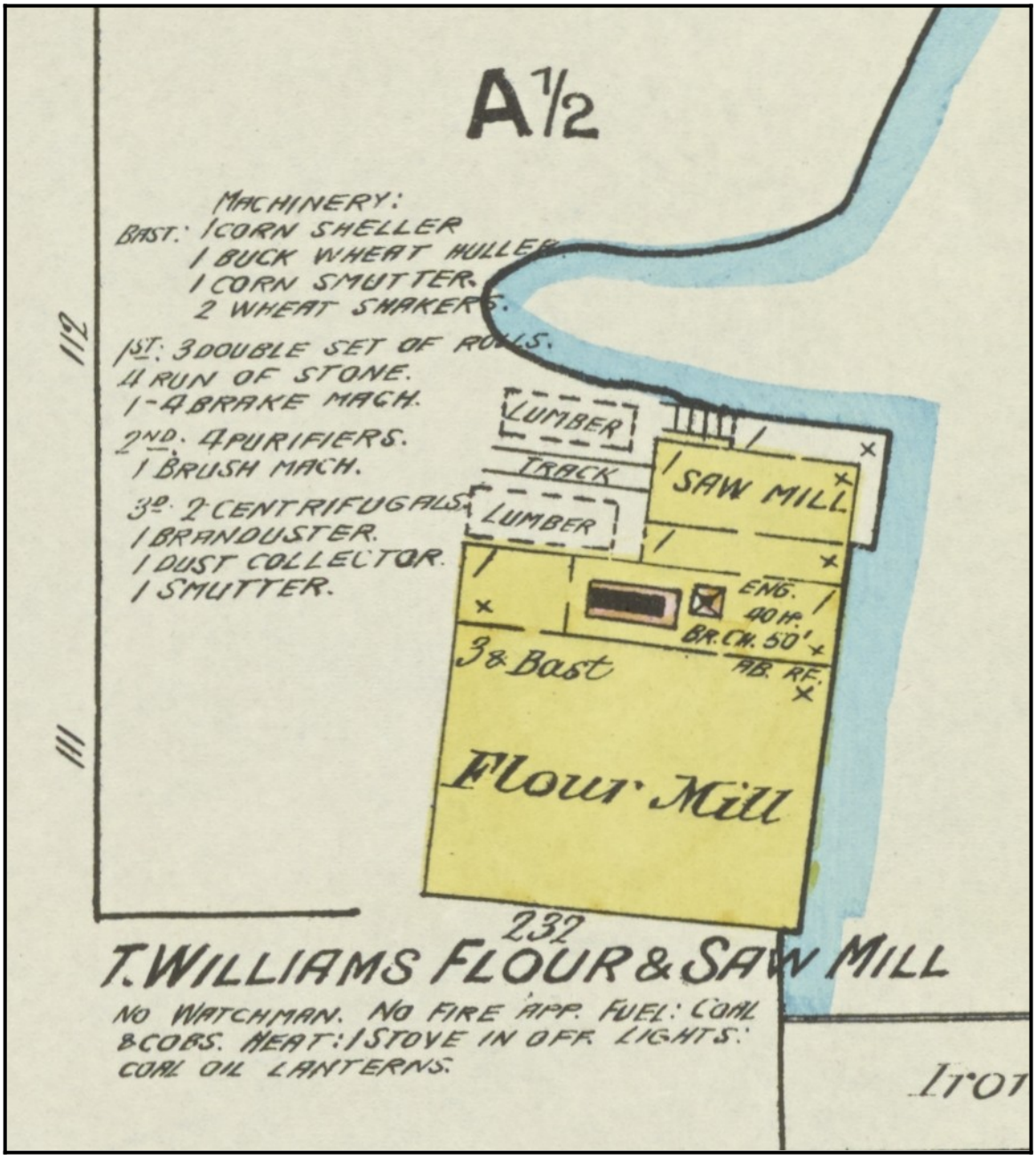
The VisitPontiac.org website recounts that Thomas Williams replaced the old log dam with a stronger and more efficient stone dam in 1881.

In 1890, William B. Burford wrote a book titled ***Pontiac and Environs***. That book is full of old photographs of the Pontiac area. Below is a photo of the Williams Mill, just one year before it burned down in 1891. This book has a photo of a very robust stone dam at the Williams Mill.

Could the Wood Exterior Wheel Been Replaced by a Turbine in 1881?

It is possible the new dam was part of an over-all upgrade to the mill which may have also included replacing an exterior water wheel with a water turbine mounted inside the mill. Water turbine technology existed in 1881 and was being used by mills.

1888 Sanborn Map Showing the Williams Mill



One of the most valuable sources for understanding the Williams Mill in the late nineteenth century is the 1888 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. Sanborn maps were prepared by the Sanborn Map Company for insurance companies to evaluate the fire risk of commercial and industrial buildings. As a result, these maps often contain remarkable details about building construction, machinery, and fire hazards.

The 1888 Sanborn map shows that Thomas Williams operated both a flour mill and a sawmill on the west bank of the Vermilion River. The sawmill was located immediately north of the flour mill. A mill race diverted water from the Vermilion River to provide power for the milling

operation before the water returned to the river downstream.

The flour mill was three stories high with a basement. The map also identifies an engine house equipped with a 40-foot brick chimney. This indicates the mill had both water power and a steam engine. The steam engine likely served as a backup source of power during periods when the river did not provide sufficient water to operate the mill.

One of the most interesting features of the map is the detailed list of machinery contained within the flour mill. Equipment on the first floor included a corn sheller, a buckwheat huller, a corn smutter, and two wheat shakers. The principal milling equipment consisted of three double sets of roller mills and four runs of millstones. Additional machinery included an air brake machine, four purifiers, a brush machine, two centrifugals, a bran duster, a dust collector, and another smutter.

This machinery demonstrates how far flour milling technology had advanced by the late nineteenth century. Early frontier grist mills often contained little more than a single pair of millstones. By 1888, the Williams Mill had become a sophisticated industrial operation capable of cleaning grain, removing impurities, grinding flour using both roller mills and millstones, and separating the finished product into different grades.

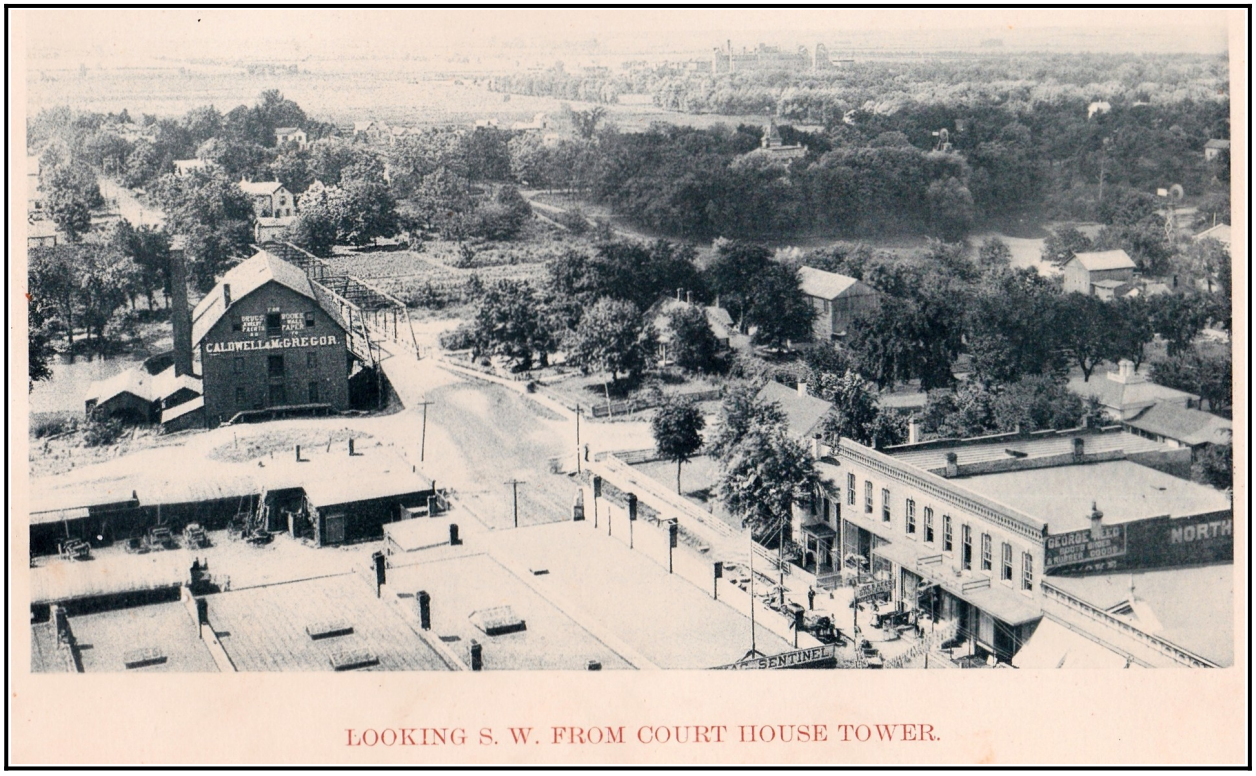
The Sanborn map also documents the fire hazards present at the mill. The insurance company noted there was no watchman and no fire apparatus. Coal was used as fuel, heat was supplied by a stove in the office, and the buildings were lighted with coal-oil lanterns. Flour mills were especially susceptible to fires because flour dust suspended in the air could ignite easily.

Although the map clearly identifies the mill as being powered by water, it does not specify whether the machinery was driven by an exterior water wheel or by an internal water turbine. A poem published in the 1878 History of Livingston County describes watching the mill's water wheel turn, suggesting that the original 1867 mill was powered by a water wheel. Whether that wheel remained in service until the mill burned in 1891 or was replaced by another type of water power has not yet been determined.

The 1888 Sanborn map preserves the last detailed view of the original Williams Mill before disaster struck. Just three years later, in November 1891, the mill was destroyed by fire. Thomas Williams rebuilt the mill on the same site in 1892, but the original structure and its machinery were lost forever.

1890 Photo of the Williams Mill

In 1890, William B. Burford wrote a book titled ***Pontiac and Environs***. That book is full of old photographs of the Pontiac area. Below is a photo of the Williams Mill, just one year before it burned down in 1891.



LOOKING S. W. FROM COURT HOUSE TOWER.

Tragedy Strikes in 1891

The Williams Mill burned to the ground in 1891. The following story about the fire was published in the November 21, 1891, edition of the Pontiac Sentinel newspaper.

IN ASHES.

Thomas Williams' Mill Burned to the Ground Tuesday—Loss $30,000—No Insurance.

Tuesday afternoon, about two o'clock, Thomas Williams' mill by the bridge took fire and was completely destroyed together with all its contents. Mr. Williams and James Daugherty were in the engine room thawing out a pipe connected with the heater. They were using a compound torch and the flame reached out and ignited some oil and grease on the machinery and from that to the woodwork like a flash of powder. Had there been at hand a few buckets of water, the fire could have been extinguished, but there were no appliances at hand and the east side of the mill was aflame in a very few seconds.

Mr. Daugherty tried to save his tools but the smoke became so dense that he found it impossible to do anything. Mr. Williams saved his books but nothing else.

The wind was blowing a gale, but fortunately was from the northwest and drove the flame and burning debris on the river. The fire company were somewhat delayed in getting on the ground but from the start it was seen that there was no saving the mill, as the flour dust, elevator and dry lumber was like a tinder box. The efforts of the fire department were principally directed to saving the bridge, which was fired several times by the intense heat, and the outbuildings of the premises of Mr. Williams, and all of these were saved with practically no damage.

The loss is a heavy one to Mr. Williams, as well as to the city. Mr. Williams has been in the milling business here for thirty-two years, conducting business on the site occupied by the ruins. In 1867, he built this mill and has operated it up to the present time, being very successful in the business. It was an immense structure 50×75 feet—the main part—with an annex containing an engine room and sawmill. It was three stories high and basement and 600,000 feet of lumber had been used in constructing it and the internal works. It was fitted up with a complete line of machinery such as was used in the time it was built and a few years ago, Mr. Williams put in a complete outfit of machinery known as the roller mills.

The machinery was run by water power but there was also a 90-horse-power engine used when the water was low. Mr. Williams has been stocking up heavily with wheat for the winter's run and had 7,500 bushels, besides some oats, corn and about 100 barrels of flour. All is now a total loss and much of the hard toil of many years is swallowed up in a few hours' time. Some of the wheat may be sold at hull price, but it is practically a total loss.

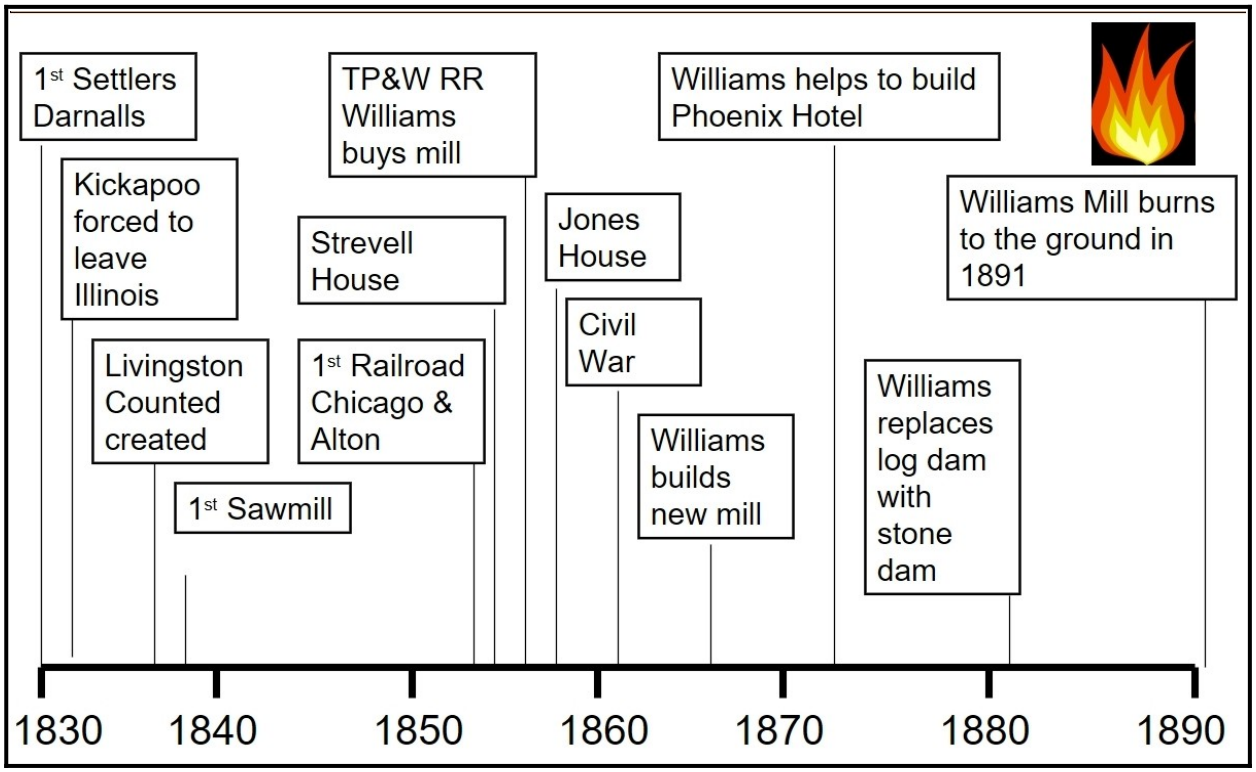
> Mr. Williams estimates his loss at $30,000, on which there was no insurance. The rate—6½ per cent—asked by the companies, Mr. Williams did not feel justified in paying, as the premium on even a moderate insurance would amount to a large sum each year.
>
> In an interview with Mr. Williams he states that he will not rebuild. He is now nearly seventy years of age and could not think of undertaking such a work at that age. It is a loss in which his friends and neighbors sympathize with him deeply, and regret that he does not feel justified in rebuilding.

Life Situations of Thomas Williams and his Son Roger Williams in 1891

When the big fire occurred, Thomas Williams was 68 years old. His son, Roger Williams, was eight years old.

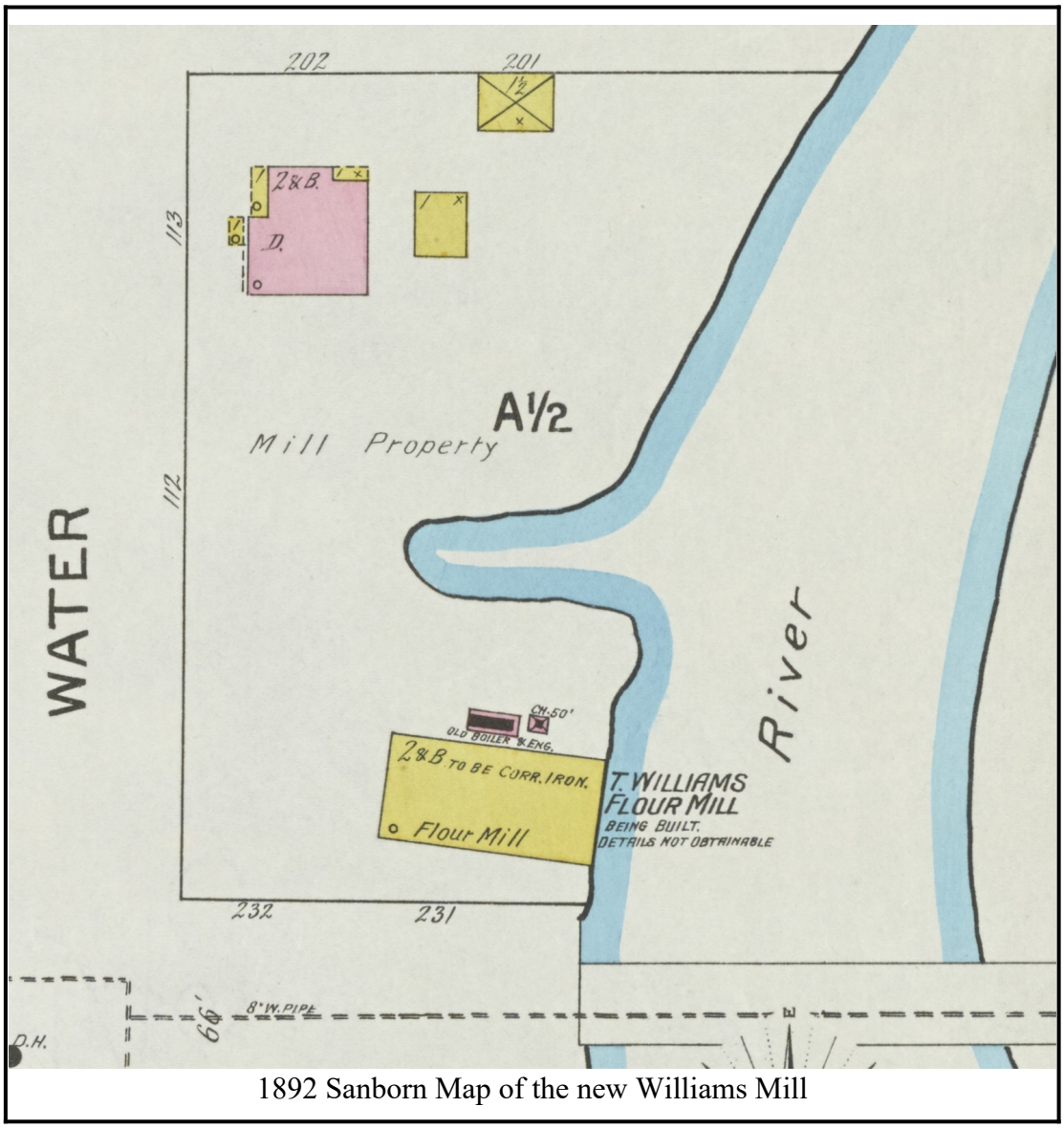
Although Thomas Williams told the newspaper reporter that he would not rebuild the mill, he later decided to rebuild the mill.

Pontiac Mill Timeline Through the 1891 Fire



1892 Sanborn Map of New Williams Mill

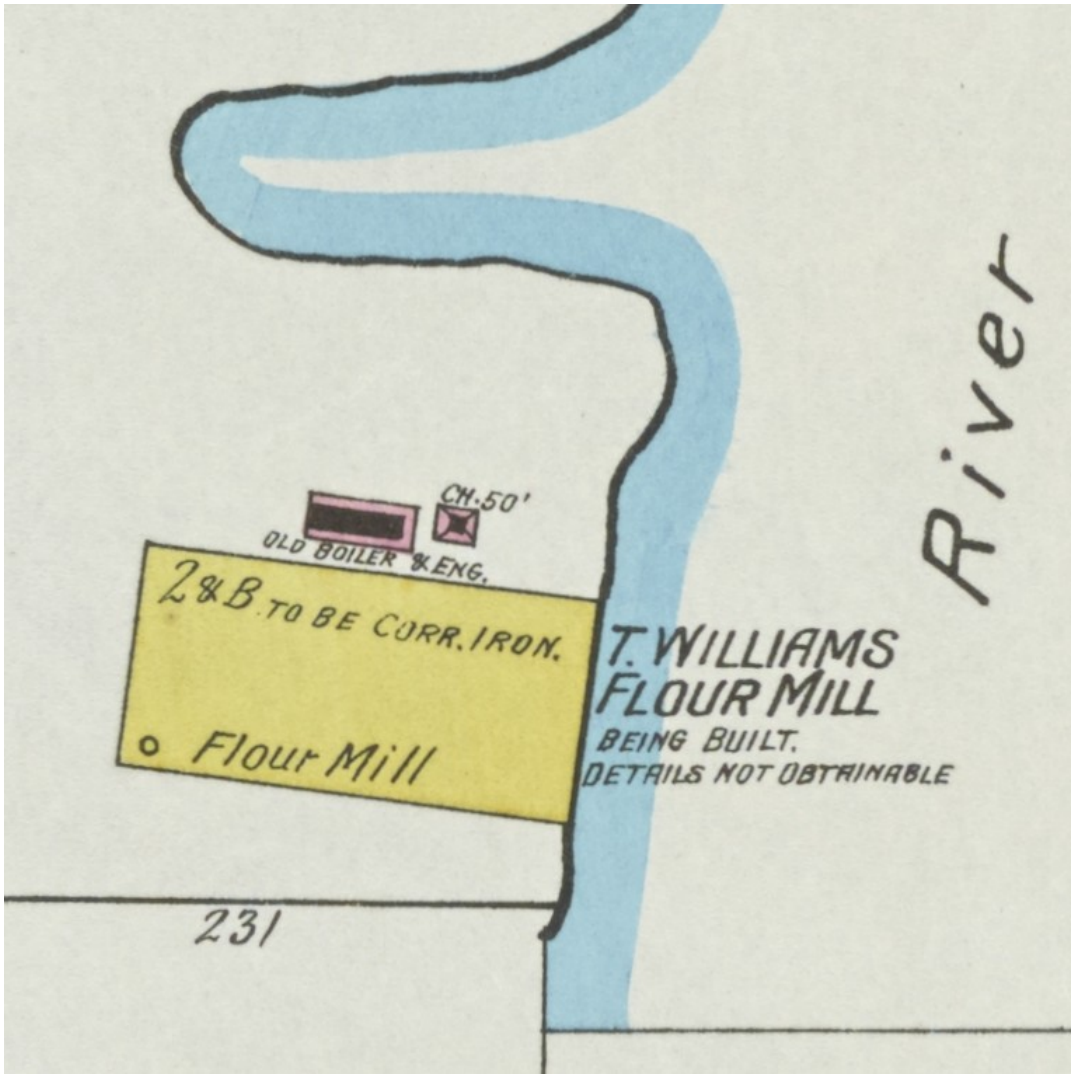
The new mill was under construction when the 1892 Sanborn map was drawn.



1892 Sanborn Map of the new Williams Mill

Note that the home located just east of the mill is included in the mill property. It has not been verified at this time, but it is likely that the mill owner, Thomas Williams lived in this home.

A magnified view of just the new mill is shown below.



1892 Sanborn Map of the new mill complex.

The 1892 Sanborn Insurance Map

The 1892 Sanborn Insurance Map captured the Williams Mill while it was being rebuilt following the disastrous fire of November 1891. The mapmaker noted that the "T. Williams Flour Mill" was "Being Built" and added the comment "Details Not Obtainable," indicating that construction had not progressed far enough for the surveyor to document the interior machinery.

The new mill occupied essentially the same location on the west bank of the Vermilion River as the earlier building. The map identifies the structure as a two-story building with a basement and indicates that it would be covered with corrugated iron. The old boiler and engine house, together with its 50-foot chimney, remained on the property and probably continued to provide auxiliary steam power whenever the river could not supply sufficient water.

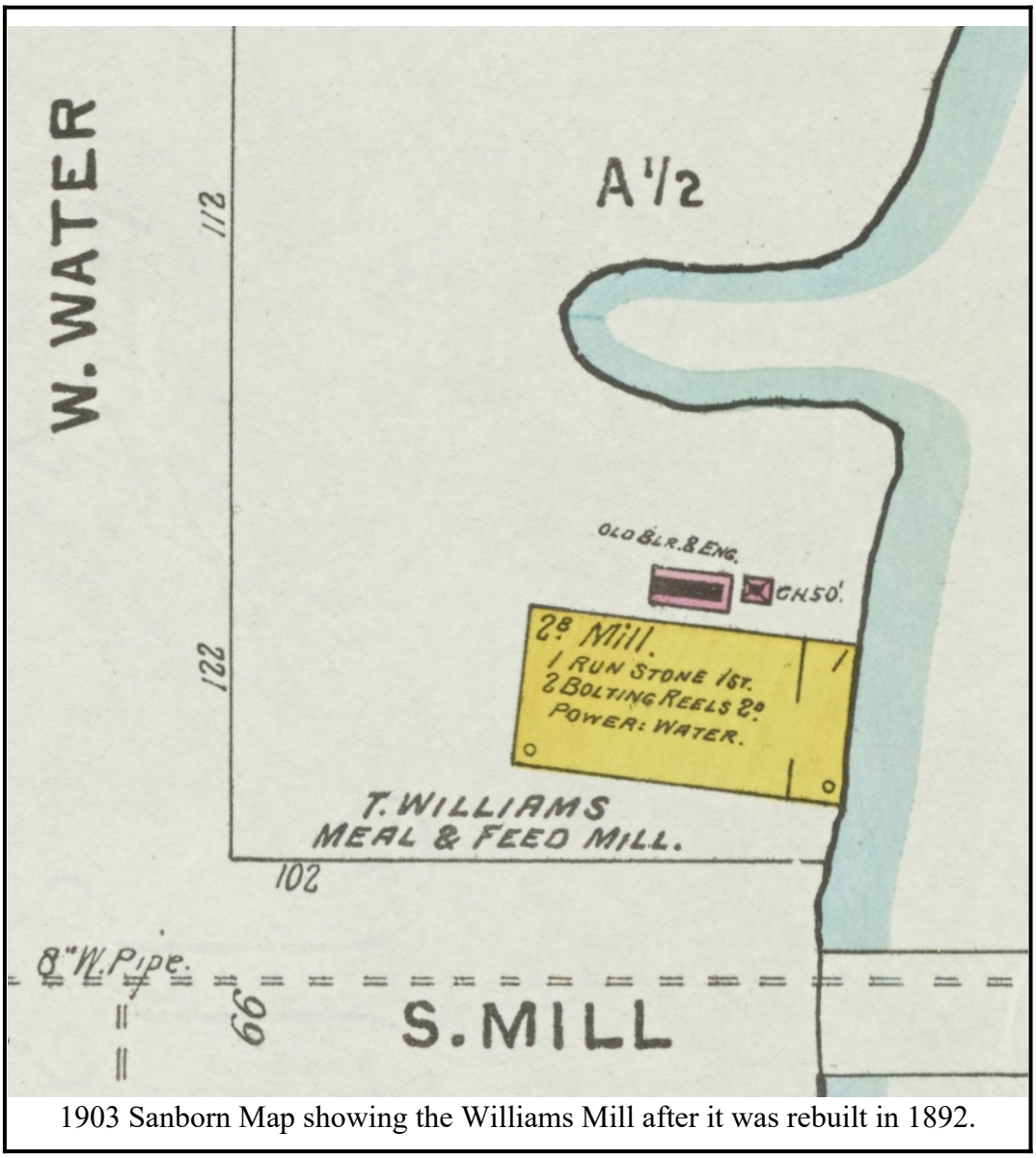
One noticeable difference between the 1888 and 1892 Sanborn maps is the absence of the sawmill. The 1888 map showed both a flour mill and a sawmill operating at the site. The 1892 map, however, depicts only the new flour mill under construction. Whether the sawmill had already been discontinued or was simply omitted because construction was still in progress is not known.

The map also provides an interesting clue regarding the mill's source of water power. The 1878 History of Livingston County includes a poem describing the mill's water wheel, indicating that the original 1867 mill was powered by a water wheel. However, the 1892 Sanborn map does not show an exterior water wheel. Likewise, none of the known historic photographs of the rebuilt mill show an exterior water wheel attached to the building.

Although the Sanborn map does not specifically identify the type of water power used, the absence of an exterior wheel on both the map and the surviving photographs suggests that the rebuilt 1892 mill may have been equipped with an internal water turbine. By the early 1890s, enclosed water turbines had become common in newly constructed flour mills because they were more efficient, occupied less space, and were better protected from flooding, ice, and weather than traditional exterior water wheels.

No document has yet been found stating that Thomas Williams installed a turbine when the mill was rebuilt after the 1891 fire. Nevertheless, the available evidence suggests that the rebuilding of 1892 may have marked the transition from the water wheel described in 1878 to a more modern internal turbine. Future discoveries may either confirm or refute this conclusion.

1903 Sanborn Map



1903 Sanborn Map showing the Williams Mill after it was rebuilt in 1892.

The 1903 Sanborn Insurance Map documents the Williams Mill after it had been rebuilt following the devastating fire of 1891. By this time the new mill had been operating for several years, allowing the Sanborn surveyor to record the building's construction, machinery, and power source in greater detail than was possible in the 1892 map.

The map identifies the business as T. Williams Meal & Feed Mill, reflecting a gradual shift from flour production to the grinding of livestock feed. The building remained a two-story structure with a basement and continued to occupy the same location along the west bank of the Vermilion River. The old boiler, engine, and 50-foot chimney were still shown on the property, indicating that steam power remained available whenever river conditions limited water power.

Unlike the 1888 Sanborn map, the 1903 map shows a much simpler milling operation. The machinery consisted of one run of millstones and two bolting reels. The surveyor simply noted

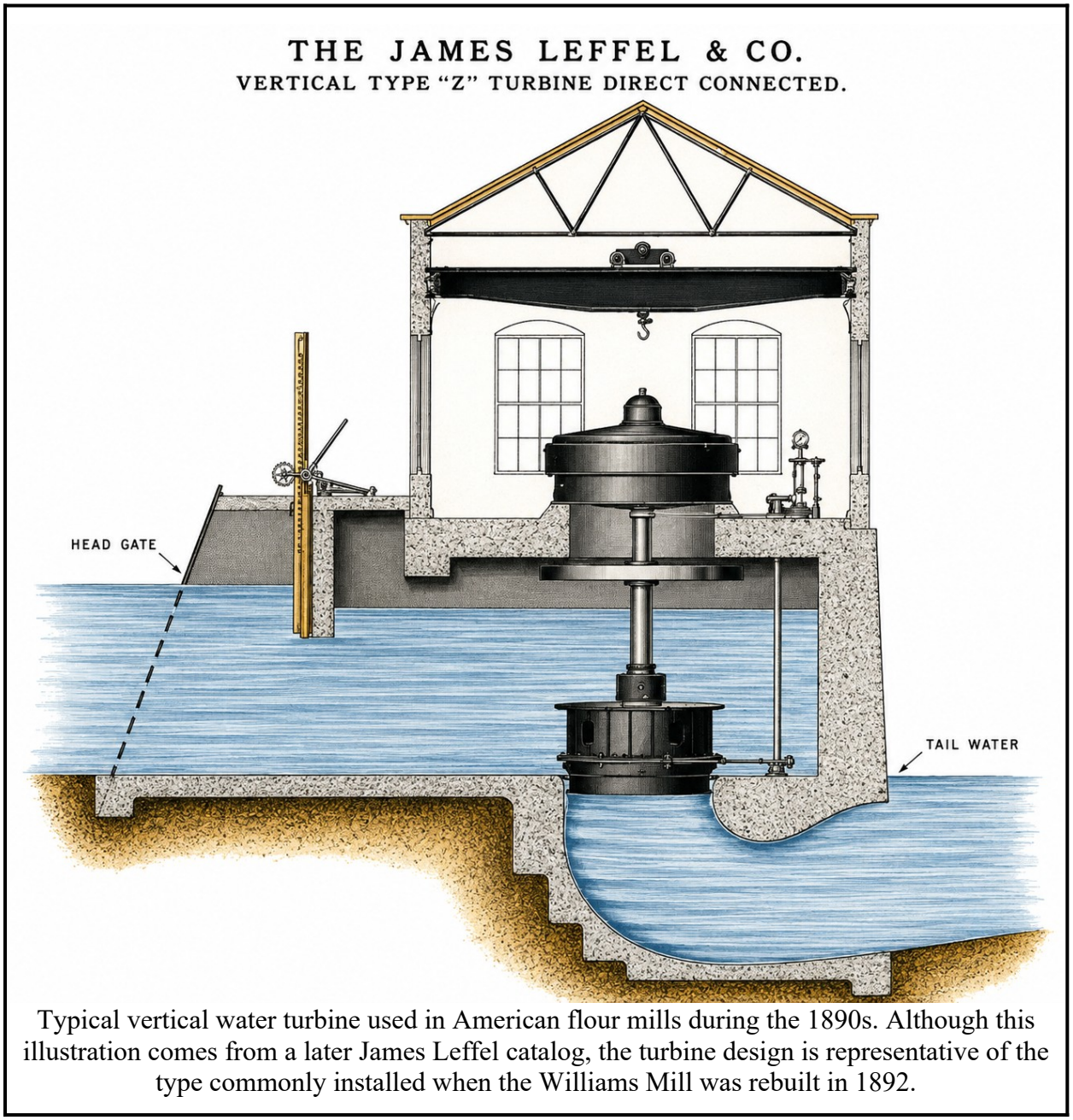
"Power: Water," without identifying the type of water power being used.

One feature is particularly noteworthy. Neither the 1903 Sanborn map nor any known photographs of the rebuilt mill show an exterior water wheel. This differs from evidence for the original 1867 mill. A poem published in the 1878 History of Livingston County described watching the mill's water wheel turn, suggesting that the first Williams Mill was powered by an exterior water wheel.

By 1903, however, enclosed water turbines had become the standard source of water power for newly constructed flour and feed mills throughout the Midwest. Turbines were more efficient than traditional water wheels, required less maintenance, were protected from weather and ice, and could be installed beneath the mill where they directly powered the line shafts. Although no surviving document has yet been found stating that Thomas Williams installed a turbine when the mill was rebuilt in 1892, the absence of an exterior water wheel on both the Sanborn map and historic photographs strongly suggests that the rebuilt mill was powered by an internal water turbine.

The 1903 Sanborn map also marks the final years of Thomas Williams' ownership. Only one year after this map was prepared, Thomas Williams died on November 17, 1904, after nearly fifty years in the milling business. The mill then passed into the hands of his son, Roger Williams, who continued operating the family business for another half century.

Typical Water Turbine Used for Grist Mills in 1892



Typical vertical water turbine used in American flour mills during the 1890s. Although this illustration comes from a later James Leffel catalog, the turbine design is representative of the type commonly installed when the Williams Mill was rebuilt in 1892.

Photographs and paintings of the Williams Mill showing the design from 1892 until it burned down in 1955 do not show any exterior water wheel. It is likely that Thomas Williams adopted the water turbine versus the water wheel when he rebuilt the mill in 1892.

Williams Mill Passes to the Second Generation in 1904

Thomas Williams passed away in 1904 at the age of 80 in Pontiac, Illinois.

The September 22, 1904 obituary for Thomas Williams from the Pontiac Leader newspaper is shown below.

THOMAS WILLIAMS, THE MILLER, DEAD
Death Due to Infirmities of Age—Was a Pioneer of this County.

Thomas Williams, one of Pontiac's pioneer citizens, died at his home on Water street this morning, after a long illness, death being due to old age and general break down.

He was born in Benbeigshire, Wales, October 9, 1823, spending his young manhood among the crags of that cliff-bound island. At the age of 21, in 1843, he sailed for this country. On arriving here he settled at Utica, New York, where he attended school and learned to speak the English language.

In 1854 he came to Illinois and this county. On arriving in this county the only occupation which afforded him work was that of farming and he hired his services to W. P. Babcock, who resided at what is now Babcock's grove, north of this city. Babcock was a strong abolitionist and Mr. Williams had the opportunity of viewing some stirring scenes about his home at that time.

He remained in the employment of Mr. Babcock for some time, leaving there to work for J. W. Remick in 1854, who was then conducting what was known as Rudd's mill several miles down the river. He worked for him some time as miller and in 1857 purchased the Corey's Mill, a mill located on the site where his present mill stands. This was torn down in course of time and a much larger one erected. This burned to the ground in 1891 and was replaced by the present one.

Mr. Williams was married in 1864 to Miss Martha Toomer, of Clinton, Oneida county, New York, to which union eight children were born, one dying in infancy. Those living are: Mrs. Belle Stark, of Carthage, Mo.; Mrs. Lizzie Skinner, of Missoula, Mont.; Misses Anna, Gertrude and Grace at home; Miss Lois, at Topeka, Kas., and Roger, at home.

For the past year or more Mr. Williams had been failing in health, but had not been confined to his bed. His son, Roger, attended to the mill, but Mr. Williams kept an oversight, being able to be about some of the time. About ten days ago he attended a meeting of the directors of the Livingston County National Bank, he being one of them, and appeared in good spirits. He was up as usual this morning but grew suddenly weak and went to his room. In a short time he passed away sitting in his chair.

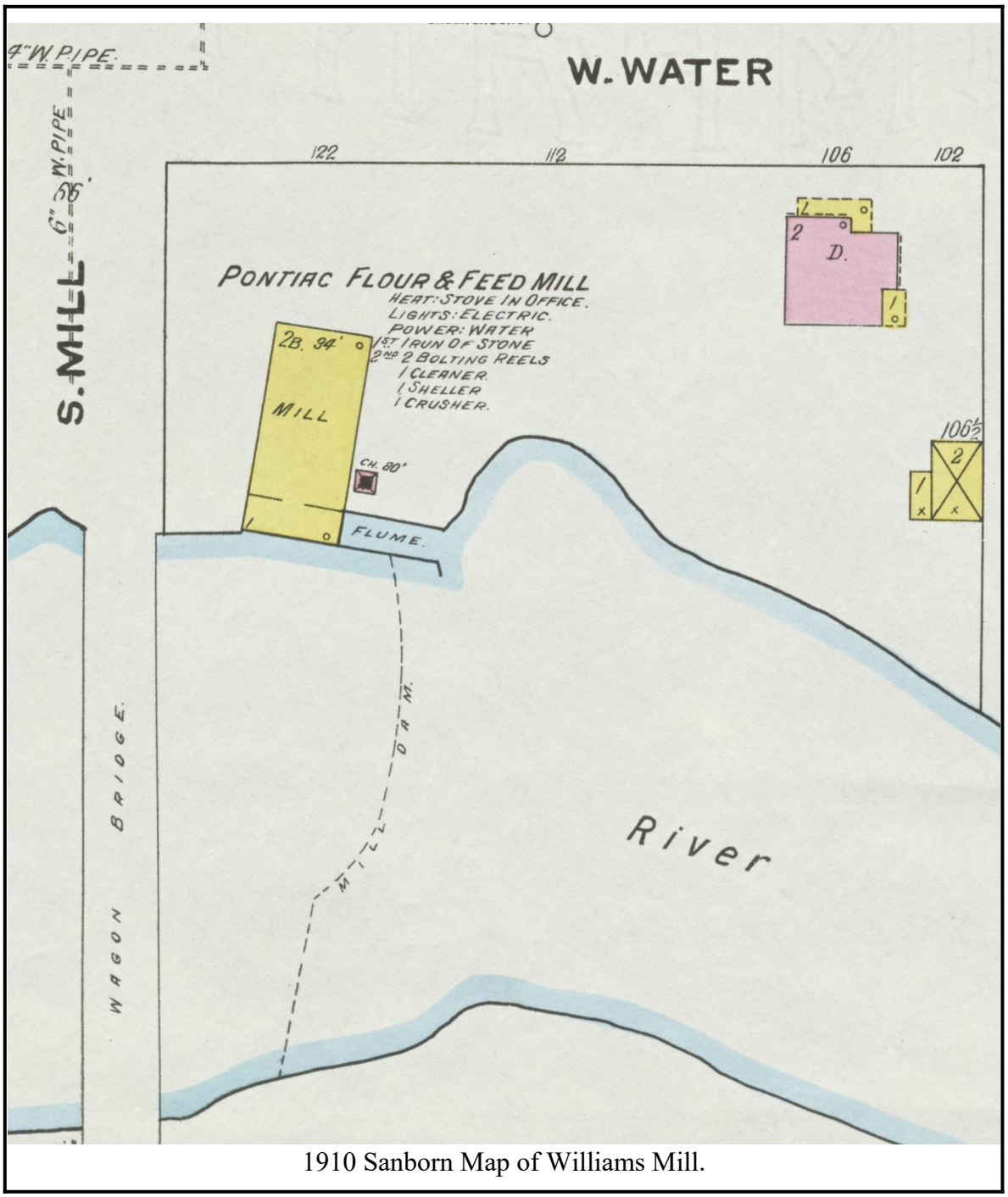
Mr. Williams was a staunch and faithful member of the Christian church and reared his family in the faith. He was a man highly respected—one who followed the even channel of his way doing good without being heralded with a blare of trumpets, setting an example of strict integrity, and Christian fortitude to all the world.

The time of the funeral has not been set, awaiting the arrival of the three daughters from the west.

Son Roger Williams

Roger Williams was 21 years of age when his father died in 1904. Roger took over the operation of Williams Mill.

1910 Sanborn Map



1910 Sanborn Map of Williams Mill.

The 1910 Sanborn Insurance Map provides another detailed look at the Williams Mill nearly two decades after it was rebuilt following the 1891 fire. By this time Thomas Williams had passed away, and his son, Roger Williams, had assumed management of the family business. The map identifies the operation as the Pontiac Flour & Feed Mill, reflecting the continued importance of both flour production and livestock feed to the business.

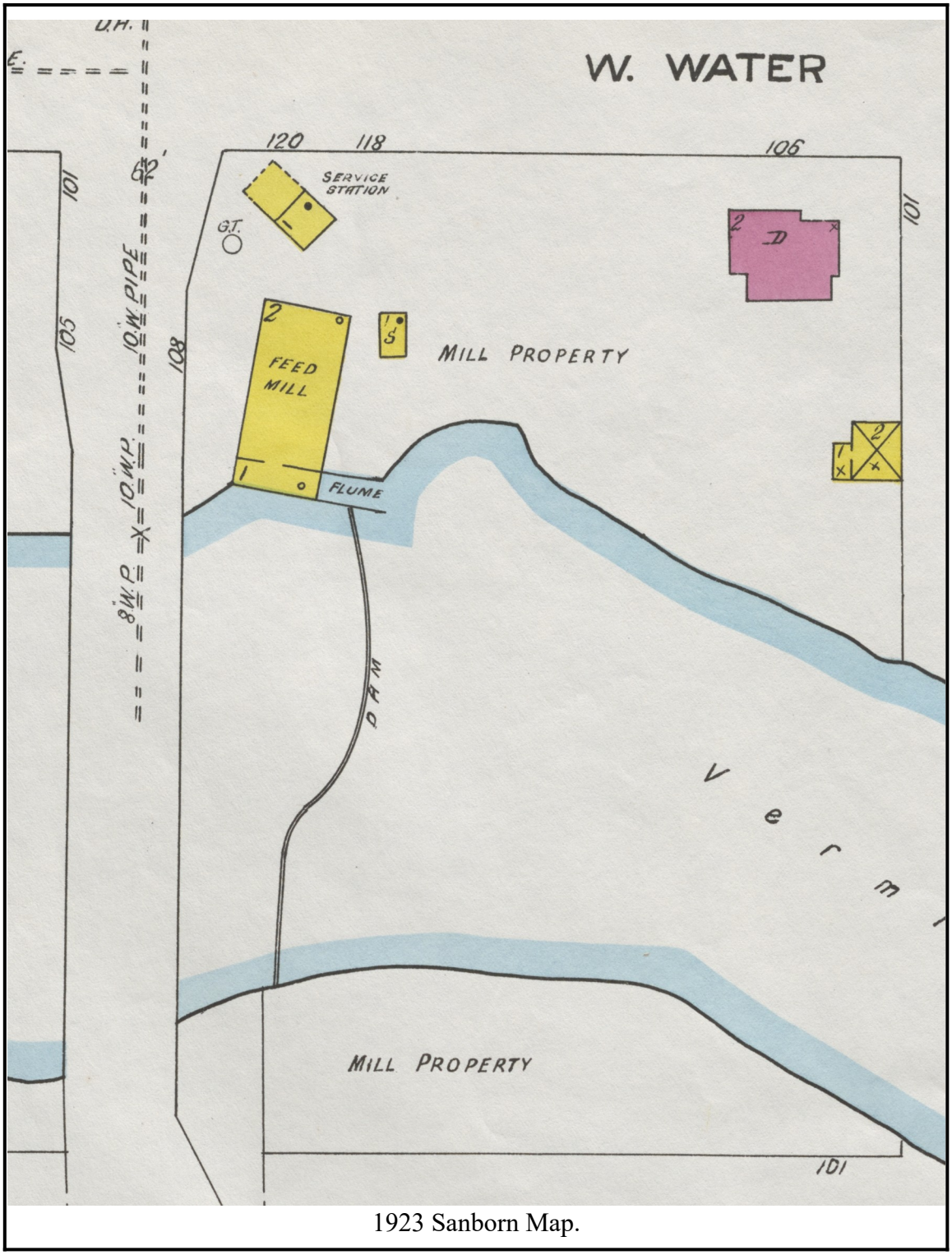
The mill remained on the west bank of the Vermilion River and continued to be powered primarily by water. One significant change from earlier Sanborn maps was the installation of electric lights. Previous maps noted that the mill was illuminated by coal-oil lanterns, but the 1910 map simply states "Lights: Electric." This improvement reduced one of the major fire hazards associated with nineteenth-century mills and illustrates how rural industries were gradually adopting new technologies during the early twentieth century.

The map lists the principal milling equipment as one run of millstones, two bolting reels, one cleaner, one sheller, and one crusher. Although the machinery was less extensive than that shown on the 1888 map, it was well suited to a mill producing flour while also grinding feed for local farmers. Heat continued to be supplied by a stove in the office, while the primary source of power remained water.

Another important feature shown on the map is the flume leading from the Vermilion River into the mill. The flume carried water from the mill race into the building where it powered the machinery before returning to the river downstream. Although the map labels the mill simply as "Power: Water," it does not identify the type of water power. As with the 1903 Sanborn map, no exterior water wheel is shown, and none appears in known historic photographs of the rebuilt mill. This evidence continues to support the conclusion that the mill was probably powered by an enclosed water turbine beneath the building rather than by an exterior water wheel.

The 1910 Sanborn map also illustrates the gradual modernization of the Williams Mill. While the mill still relied on the same dependable water power that had attracted the first settlers to the site more than seventy years earlier, newer technologies such as electric lighting had been incorporated into the operation. The result was a mill that successfully combined nineteenth-century water power with the conveniences of the twentieth century.

1923 Sanborn Map



1923 Sanborn Map.

The 1923 Sanborn Insurance Map provides the final detailed Sanborn record of the Williams Mill. By this time Roger Williams had been operating the family business for nearly twenty years following the death of his father, Thomas Williams, in 1904. The map reflects a mature milling operation that had changed little in appearance since the rebuilt mill began operating in 1892.

One noticeable change is that the building is now identified simply as a Feed Mill, indicating that livestock feed had become the principal product manufactured at the site. This reflected a broader trend throughout the Midwest during the early twentieth century as many smaller flour mills shifted their emphasis to grinding feed for local farmers. The mill continued to occupy the same location along the west bank of the Vermilion River and remained connected to the river by the mill flume that supplied water for power.

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the 1923 map has little to do with the mill itself. For the first time, a service station appears on the mill property adjacent to West Water Street. During the previous century, the Williams Mill had served customers arriving by wagon pulled by horses or oxen. By 1923, the automobile had become a common means of transportation, and gasoline service stations were appearing throughout Pontiac. The addition of a service station on the property illustrates how rapidly transportation had changed during Roger Williams' lifetime and how businesses adapted to the new automobile age.

Although the Sanborn map no longer provides details of the mill's machinery, it continues to show the flume that carried water from the Vermilion River into the mill. As in the 1903 and 1910 maps, no exterior water wheel is shown. Combined with the historic photographs of the rebuilt mill, this continues to support the conclusion that the mill was probably powered by an enclosed water turbine rather than an exterior water wheel.

The 1923 Sanborn map serves as the final chapter in a remarkable series of insurance maps documenting the evolution of the Williams Mill. Beginning with the original flour and sawmill shown in 1888, continuing through the rebuilding after the 1891 fire, and ending with the feed mill operated by Roger Williams, the Sanborn maps preserve a visual record of more than thirty-five years of change at one of Pontiac's most important industrial landmarks.

CHAPTER 4

1924 to 1954

Amitytown Society of Painters

Around 1910, Pontiac residents Dr. Thomas Lockie, Thomas F. Googerty, and Moore Foster began meeting to sketch and paint landscapes. They met regularly at the farm of Lyle Husted and his wife Viola Husted in rural Cornell. The village of Cornell is in Amity Township.

The farm was located along the Vermilion River and became the gathering place for the early artists. Viola Husted was an artist and participated in the painting sessions.

Over the following decades, this group of artists grew. They began holding an annual exhibition of the works by local artists, usually in the fourth quarter of each year. They initially varied the location of where they held these annual art exhibits.

In 1945, the Amitytown Society of Painters began to hold their annual art exhibits at the old Williams Mill.

Catharine and Paul Yost Plan Art Exhibit in 1945

The September 20, 1945, Pantagraph published a story about this upcoming art event.

> **TO EXHIBIT LOCKIE PAINTINGS**
>
> PONTIAC.─A memorial exhibit of paintings of the late Dr. Thomas Lockie, one of the charter members of the Amitytown Society of Painters, will be included in the annual exhibit of the painting society to be held Oct. 1 and 2 at the old mill.
>
> Members present at a meeting Tuesday night held to discuss plans for the annual event included Mrs. Grace Tuesburg, Mrs. Eleanor Gotschall, Mrs. Louise Schneider, Miss Catharine Yost, Mrs. Thelma Gehring, Jack Carter, Stephen Adsit and Paul Yost.

More on Upcoming Amitytown Exhibit

The September 30, 1945, Pantagraph published another article about the upcoming exhibit in Pontiac.

> **Paintings of Local Scenes To Be on Exhibit**
>
> PONTIAC.─Fifteen of the 45 paintings to be exhibited by members of the Amitytown Society of Painters here will be the work of the late Dr. Thomas Lockie, who more than a quarter century ago recorded the scenes of the Vermilion river country on canvas and art paper.
>
> The gallery will be open to the public Monday night, Tuesday and Tuesday night. The exhibit will be held in the Old Mill beside the Mill street dam.
>
> In addition to the works of Dr. Lockie, paintings to be displayed will include those by Thomas Googerty, Stephen Adsit, Jack Carter, Mrs. Louise Schneider, Miss Catharine Yost, Mrs. Eleanor Gotschal and Mrs. Thelma Gehring.

Amitytown Exhibit in 1945

The October 2, 1945, Pantagraph published an article about this exhibition.

> **Amitytown Society Nails Up Its Best**
>
> PONTIAC.─Tossing aside paints and crayons, paint brushes and sketch books, Pontiac painters armed themselves with hammers, picture wire, step-ladders and nails ─ even a broom or two ─ and worked diligently several hours Sunday afternoon in the Old Mill to put up their 1945 exhibit of works by the members of the Amitytown Society of Painters.
>
> To the accomplishment of a steady downpour of rain and the thundering of water rushing over the dam below the mill, the artists hung 45 canvasses, including 15 especially chosen paintings of the late Dr. Thomas Lockie, one of the founders of the society.
>
> The exhibit opened formally Monday night and will open to the public also on Tuesday, and Tuesday night.
>
> Paintings shown in the exhibit in the Old Mill include the following by the late Dr. Lockie, who, with Mr. Googerty, many of whose current works are on display, and Moore Foster, sketched the beauties of the Vermilion river country in Amity township more than a quarter of a century ago. These three later employed other media ─ crayons, water color, charcoal, oils ─ and still later formed the nucleus of what became the Amitytown Society of Painters, which is now holding its fifth exhibit.

Works Displayed

Dr. Lockie:

Tree Pattern
Vermilion River
Brown County, Indiana
Indiana Landscape
The4 House Across the Street
Flowers, Still Life
Long Ira's
Brown county Cabin
Farm Home
Cabin in the Woods, Brown County
Byroad
Landscape
Self-Portrait
Old Stone House, Dry Point
Grace Church, Dry Point
Bend in the River
Pencil Sketch
Trees, Pencil Sketch

Catharine Yost:

Suzanne
My Hat
Self Portrait
The Old South Church
A West Virginia Road
In the Time of Roses
West Virginia Hills
The Old Jarvis Place

Thomas Googerty:

Landscape, Sunshine
Brown County Landscape
Evening
Landscape
Country Road in June

Thelma Gehring:

Rubrum Lilies
Still Life
Pear Blossom
Portrait of Eleanor
Thunbergia Grandiflora

Stephen Adsit:

Young's Bridge
A Country Road
Bouquet

Jack Carter:

Church on the Square
The Mill
The Street

Eleanor Gotschall:

Hollywood Farm
Self Portrait

Ann Allen Myers:

Still Life, Pastel

Louise Schneider:

A Scene at Wedron, Illinois

Pantagraph Photographs that Accompanied October 2, 1945 Article

PONTIAC. A feature of the Amitytown Society of Painters exhibit is a gallery of 15 paintings by the late Dr. Thomas Lockie, society's founder. Hanging his works are Thelma Gehring, Paul Yost. The others are Louise Schneider and Roger Williams.

It is assumed the Roger Williams shown in the above photo was the owner of the Williams Mill in 1945 when this exhibit was held.

TWO OTHER MEMBERS of the society, made up of Pontiac painters, hang Lockie's "Cabin in the Woods" (below) and "Tree Pattern" (above). They are Stephen Adsit, left and Jack Carter.

THE ARTISTS rest on feed sacks in the Old Mill, where the exhibit is open through Tuesday, after the rigorous job of cleaning the place and hanging the paintings. Left to right, Mrs. Gehring, Mrs. Eleanor Gotschall, Mr. Adsit and Mr. Carter.

Williams Mill in 1947

The Pantagraph published an article on September 16, 1947 on the Williams' Mill in Pontiac.

Williams' Mill at Pontiac Called Popular Old Landmark

Saturday Club, Amateur Artists Use the Building

By Stanley Lantz

PONTIAC. ─ There's an old landmark on the Vermilion river, right in the heart of Pontiac known as Williams' mill. It isn't really so ancient as many of its counterparts in the eastern part of the country, nor quite so picturesque. If anybody knows what "picturesque" really means.

Old time residents of the community, however, go sentimental when they see or talk about Williams' mill. It looks just about the same today as it has for longer than most anyone can remember, so it's considered a local landmark and it's been photographed and painted and written about for a good many years.

Roger Williams is the proprietor. Like his father before him, he grinds feed. He has time, though, to putter and talk to his cronies and tell visitors about the mill.

He says the business has been running on the same site for nearly a hundred years, but the present building is little more than half that old. They never had a regular mill wheel like you see in the pictures. They used to have a flat “sidewinder” wheel, but the grinding is all done now by electricity.

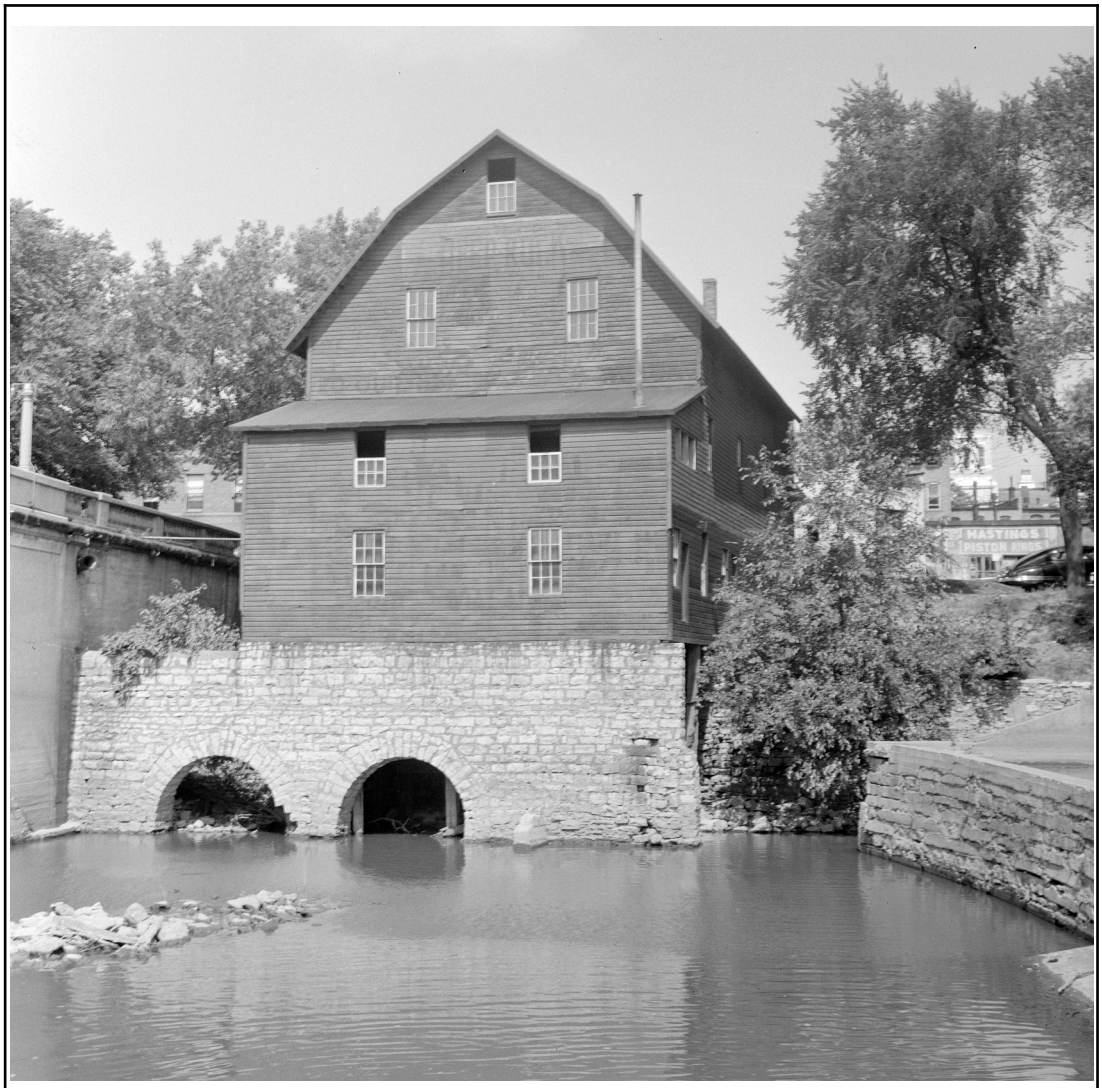
Mr. Williams and some of his friends have fixed up a back room for a clubhouse, where they hold a stag supper ever Saturday night. The idea stated about 20 years ago when a local lodge held a fish fry and had a lot of fish left over. Someone suggested a “private fish fry” at the mill, so about a dozen men, including Mr. Williams, enjoyed a late fish supper in the back room. They’ve met every Saturday night since. To eat, of course.

Another group which makes use of the mill is the Amitytown Society of Painters, a local organization of amateur artists. For six years the painters have held a public exhibit of their work. Eleven artists exhibited 45 paintings last year.

With the mill continuing to attract art lovers and food lovers, not to mention the regular feed customers, it’s likely to remain a well known spot for a good many more years.

Pantagraph Negative

The Pantagraph sent a reporter to Pontiac to take a photo of the Williams Mill. The negative for this photo was recently released and published online. A copy of the negative is shown below. The caption from the newspaper article has been added to the negative.



Williams' mill, located on the Vermilion river in Pontiac, has been the subject of post cards, amateur paintings, and photographs for nearly a century. The original building was erected in the 1850s, the one shown above during the gay 1890s.

Annual Amitytown Exhibit in 1948

The November 26, 1948, Pantagraph, published a story about the event.

Members Show 60 Paintings at Memory-Mill

PONTIAC.─The art of self expression was in full view Sunday afternoon as the Amitytown Painters Society of Pontiac opened their eighth annual public exhibition of paintings here at Williams Memory Mill.

By evening more than 250 persons had viewed the collections of the 13 exhibiting members of the society. Sixty paintings were displayed, making this the society's biggest show.

In commenting on this year's show, Miss Catharine V. Yost, president of the society, said, "Everything's splendid as it brings out individualism, which is one of the first aims of our organization."

"The founders of Amitytown Society, Miss Yost continued, "had one thing uppermost in their mind─doing something for the younger people to get them started in art."

"One thing that thrills me the most is that we have added several young exhibitors this year. And remember, we're not a closed corporation ─ we welcome anyone who desires to join us."

"Amitytown Society is not maintained for art instruction, but is merely a group of people with one main purpose─art."

Miss Yost added that "not all the members exhibit each year─of course we would like them to, but there is nothing which is compulsory about us."

"Should a member wish to show a painting in the exhibit there are two things we do ask of them: One, that the painting must have been completed during the year, and the other, that it must not be a copy."

The society has eighteen members this year. The thirteen who had paintings on display Sunday included, Miss Yost, Steve Adsit, Thelma Gehring, Maurine McClelland, Eleanor Gotchall, Lawrence A. Clark, Beatrice Von Kanel, Ruth Wrightam, Dr. Harold Schroeder, Esther Thornton, Mildred Fry, Clarence V. Durham and John C. McGregor. Miss Fry, Mr. Durham, and Mr. McGregor are the three new exhibitors.

Roger Williams, owner of the Pontiac Mill, ceases the mill activities for two days each year to allow the society to have its show.

CHAPTER 5

1955

Williams Mill Burns in April of 1955

The mill at the Mill Street Bridge was a popular tourist attraction and it was photographed and painted by many artists. The Amitytown Painters Society held their annual art exhibitions at the old Williams Mill.

The April 10, 1955, Pantagraph published a story about a major fire at the mill. A few years after this major fire, the mill was completely torn down.

Williams Mill, Pontiac Sight, Damaged by Fire

PONTIAC─ The 62 year old mill feed mill owned by Roger Williams burned in the early morning hours Saturday.

The fire was discovered at 12:30 a.m. by a passing taxi driver. Pontiac firemen worked until 3 a.m. before bringing the blaze under control.

Fire Chief Louis Kridner said the fire, which started in the northeast corner of the building, "was definitely caused by spontaneous combustion."

Corn Ruined

Metal on the exterior walls of the building was buckled by heat and the interior was badly gutted. Water ruined 400 bushels of seed corn stored in the building and damaged equipment and tools in the basement.

The corn, valued at $4,600 was owned and insured by a seed corn company. There was no insurance on the building.

There was a sawmill on the site in 1857, when Thomas Williams, father of the present owner, bought the land. In the 1870s Thomas Williams built a feed mill and threw a dam across the Kickapoo to provide power for it. Steam power was added later.

The old mill burned November 17, 1891, Mr. Williams recalled Saturday. "It was the first freeze of winter and the water pipes froze up under the engine room. Someone took hot coals out of the furnace to warm the pipes and they caught the cobwebs on fire.

Burned for Year

"About 9,000 bushels of wheat stored upstairs fell down on the fire. It smoldered and burned for a year," he said.

Thomas Williams built a new mill on the old foundations, keeping the original chimney in use.

The mill has served as a meeting place for a group of of Pontiac men who gathered for supper and talk with Mr. Williams every Saturday night since the 1920s.

Two Errors in the Pantagraph Story about the Fire

There were two errors in the Pantagraph story about the fire. The river that was dammed up for the mill was the Vermilion River, not the Kickapoo River.

The article also said the first mill burned down because someone caught the cobwebs on fire. The reporter likely should have reported the corn cobs caught on fire.

CHAPTER 6

1956 to 1961

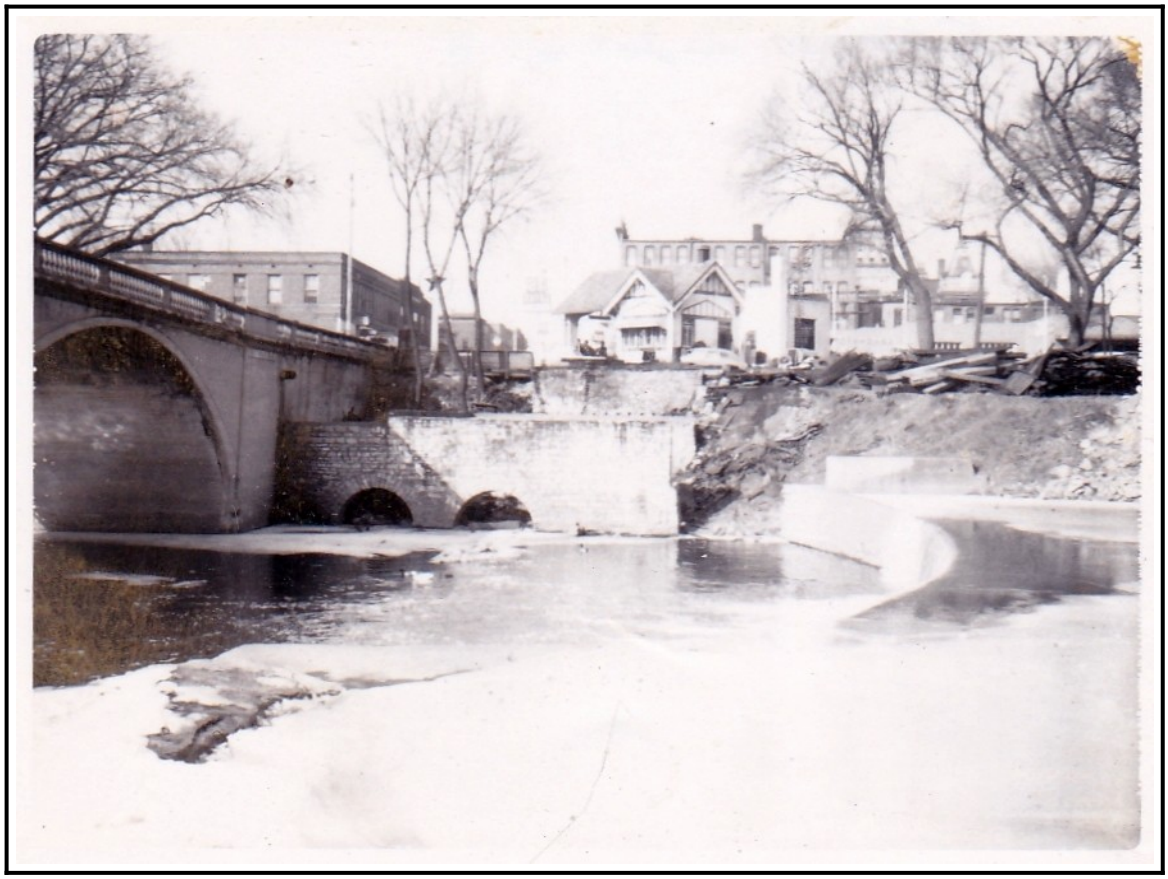
February 1958 Photos of Debris Left After the Big 1955 Fire

An unknown photographer took photos of what was left of the Williams Mill in February of 1958. These photos are in the archives of the Livingston County Historical Society and they have been uploaded to Archive.Org for permanent preservation.

Copies of these photos are shown below.

U.S.
ROYAL

US
ROYAL



U.S.
ROYAL
TIRES

US
ROYAL

Death of Roger Williams in 1961

His obituary from the March 28, 1961, Pontiac Leader newspaper is shown below.

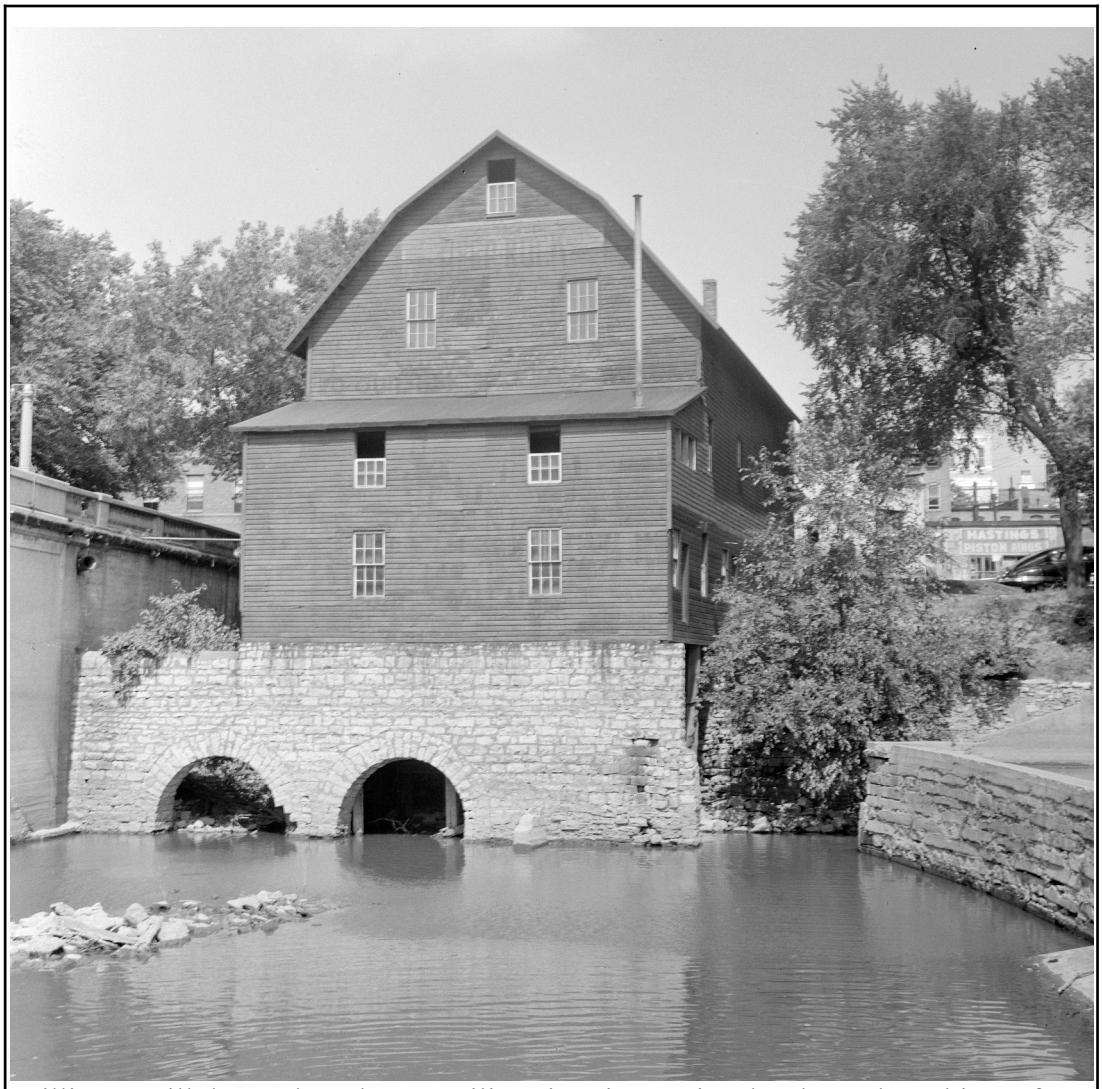
> **Roger Williams**
>
> Burial will be in South Side cemetery. Friends may call after 4 p.m. Wednesday at the funeral home.
>
> Mr. Williams, who died Monday at 11:20 a.m., operated the Williams Mill for many years. The past 18 years he has served as volunteer weather observer for the U. S. Weather Bureau.
>
> He was born June 13, 1883, in Pontiac, a son of Thomas and Martha Williams. He was educated in Pontiac schools. He married Hattie Wilson in 1905.
>
> He was a member of the Christian church and of the Pontiac Country club, serving for a number of years as president of the board.
>
> Survivors are two sisters, Miss Grace Williams, Pontiac, and Mrs. Lois Fuller, Great Falls, Mont.; three daughters, Mrs. Frances Scott, Portland, Ore.; Mrs. Esther Moncrief, Seattle, Wash., and Mrs. Martha Rich, Pontiac, and seven grandchildren.
>
> Four sisters preceded him in death.

His death occurred about six years after the Williams Mill burned down in 1955. Roger Williams was 77 years of age when he died.

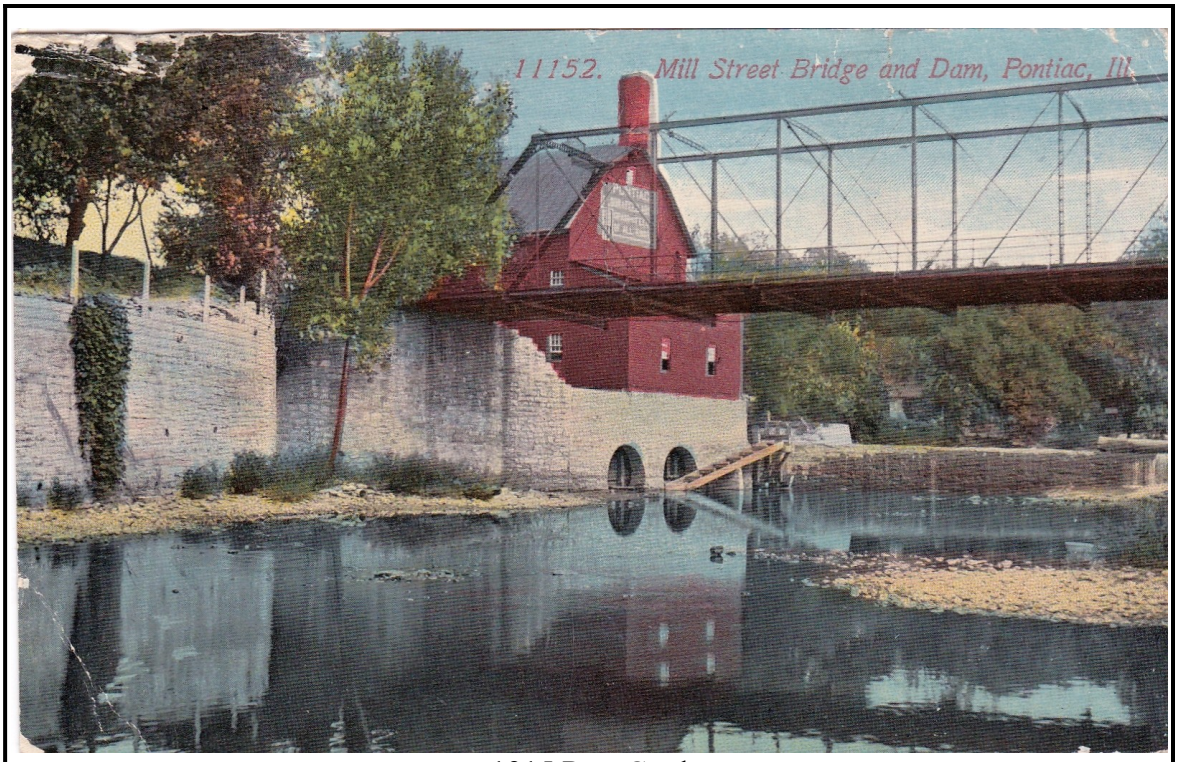
CHAPTER 7

Miscellaneous Photos and Paintings of Williams Mill

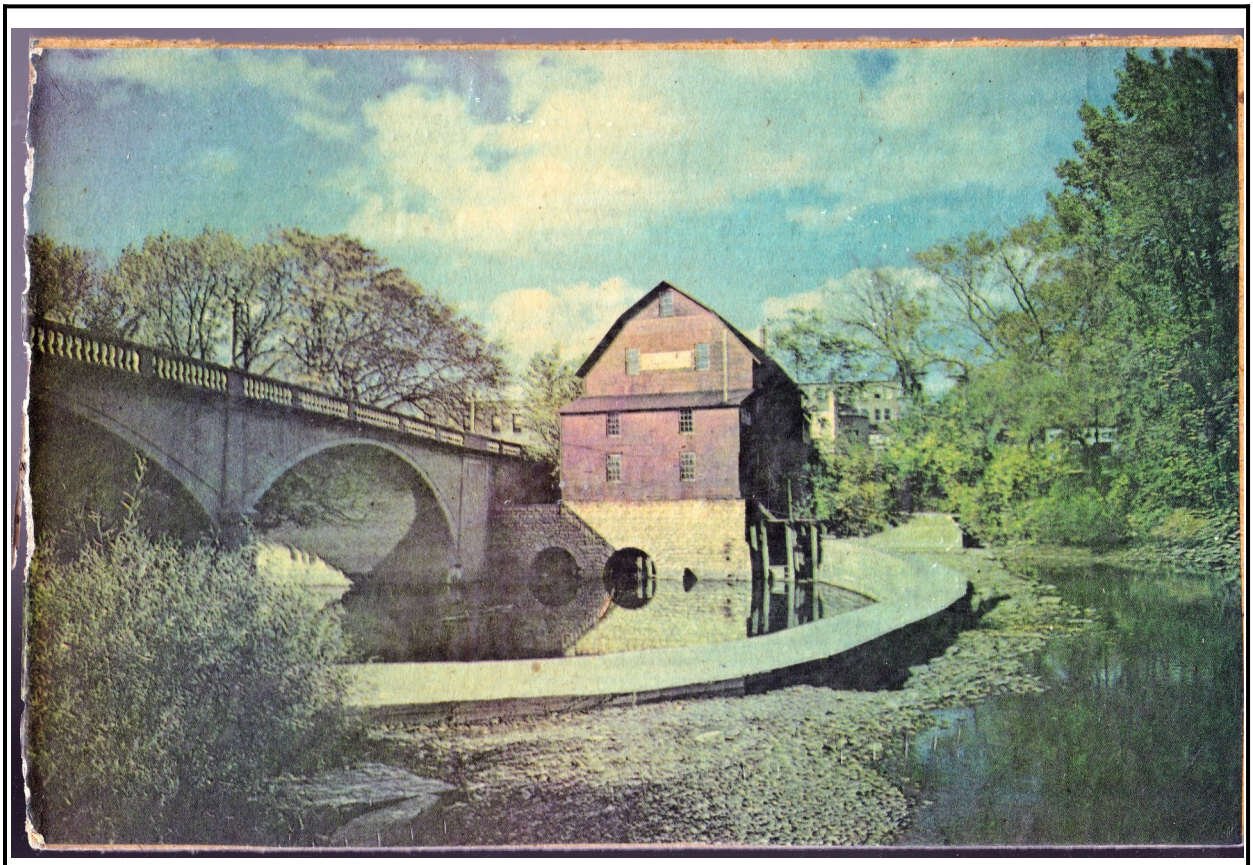
The Williams Mill fascinates people and many artists like to make paintings of the old mill. Shown below is a sampling of some of these photos and paintings.



Williams' mill, located on the Vermilion river in Pontiac, has been the subject of post cards, amateur paintings, and photographs for nearly a century. The original building was erected in the 1850s, the one shown above during the gay 1890s. From a 1947 Pantagraph negative.



1915 Post Card



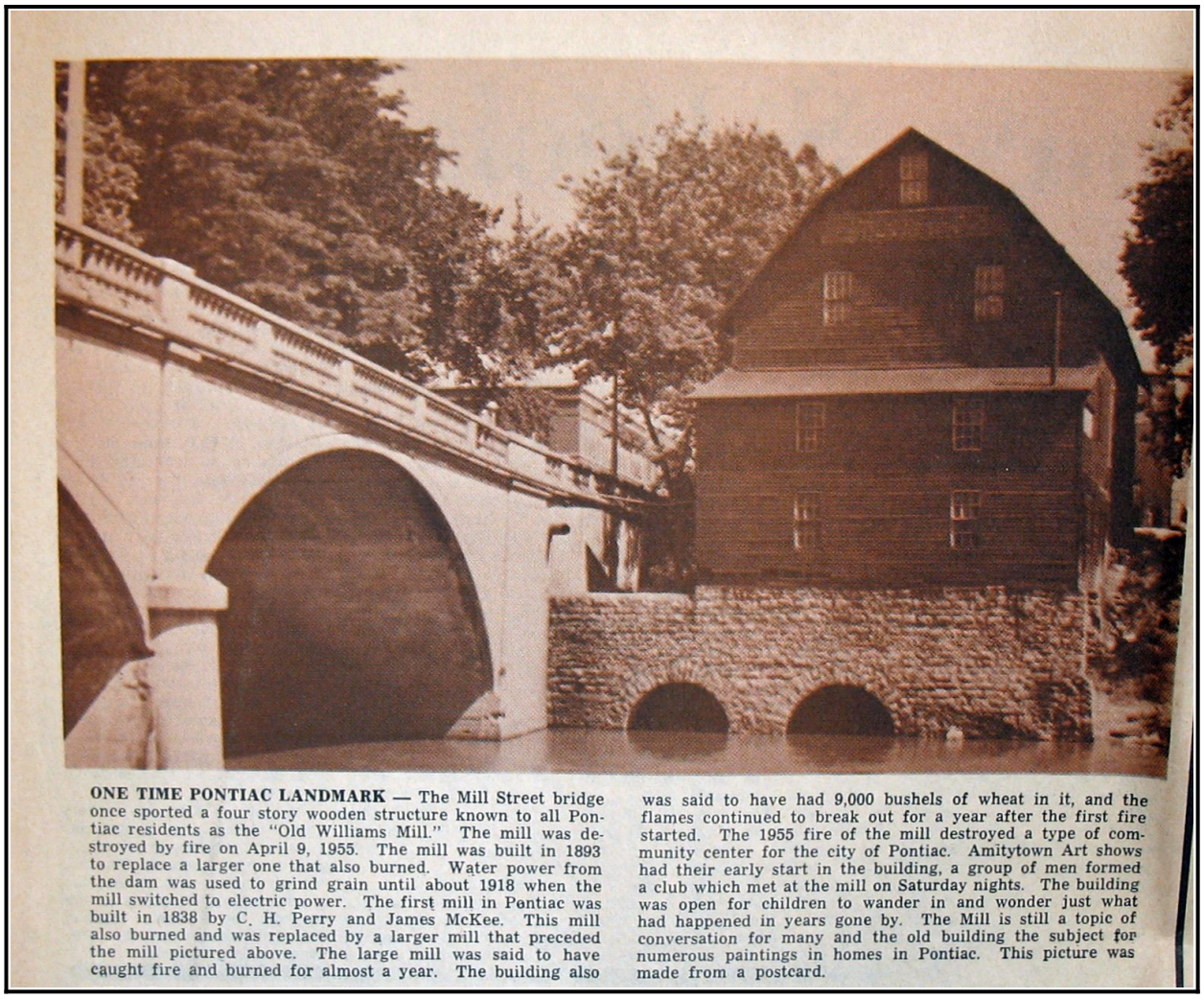
Undated photo of Williams Mill.

Undated painting of Williams Mill by Nancy Jacobs.

Undated painting of Williams Mill by Pontiac artist Harold Cunningham.

LOOKING S. W. FROM COURT HOUSE TOWER.

Photo from 1890 book about Pontiac, Illinois. Prison is shown on upper right.



ONE TIME PONTIAC LANDMARK — The Mill Street bridge once sported a four story wooden structure known to all Pontiac residents as the "Old Williams Mill." The mill was destroyed by fire on April 9, 1955. The mill was built in 1893 to replace a larger one that also burned. Water power from the dam was used to grind grain until about 1918 when the mill switched to electric power. The first mill in Pontiac was built in 1838 by C. H. Perry and James McKee. This mill also burned and was replaced by a larger mill that preceded the mill pictured above. The large mill was said to have caught fire and burned for almost a year. The building also was said to have had 9,000 bushels of wheat in it, and the flames continued to break out for a year after the first fire started. The 1955 fire of the mill destroyed a type of community center for the city of Pontiac. Amitytown Art shows had their early start in the building, a group of men formed a club which met at the mill on Saturday nights. The building was open for children to wander in and wonder just what had happened in years gone by. The Mill is still a topic of conversation for many and the old building the subject for numerous paintings in homes in Pontiac. This picture was made from a postcard.

This was likely a Pontiac Leader newspaper article. The caption is shown in larger font below.

ONE TIME PONTIAC LANDMARK — The Mill Street bridge once sported a four story wooden structure known to all Pontiac residents as the "Old Williams Mill." The mill was destroyed by fire on April 9, 1955. The mill was built in 1893 to replace a larger one that also burned. Water power from the dam was used to grind grain until about 1918 when the mill switched to electric power. The first mill in Pontiac was built in 1838 by C. H. Perry and James McKee. This mill also burned and was replaced by a larger mill that preceded the mill pictured above. The large mill was said to have caught fire and burned for almost a year. The building also was said to have had 9,000 bushels of wheat in it, and the flames continued to break out for a year after the first fire started. The 1955 fire of the mill destroyed a type of community center for the city of Pontiac. Amitytown Art shows had their early start in the building, a group of men formed a club which met at the mill on Saturday nights. The building was open for children to wander in and wonder just what had happened in years gone by. The Mill is still a topic of conversation for many and the old building the subject for numerous paintings in homes in Pontiac. This picture was made from a postcard.

CHAPTER 8

Closing Thoughts

The story of the Williams Mill is really the story of the history of Pontiac and Livingston County. The first sawmill was built in Pontiac in 1838 because the newly established county seat needed lumber to construct homes, businesses, and its first courthouse.

As Pontiac grew over the years, the Williams Mill evolved through at least three major iterations because of devastating fires and advances in milling technology. By the time the final mill was completed in 1892, it incorporated the latest innovations for grinding grain using water power from the Vermilion River.

For 117 years, the Williams Mill was a familiar landmark in Pontiac. Nearly everyone crossing the Mill Street bridge on their way to downtown passed the towering mill, making it one of the city's most recognizable sights.

During its later years, the mill became more than an industrial building. It also served as a social and cultural gathering place. Private fish fries were held there for more than two decades, and the Amitytown Society of Painters used the historic mill as the setting for many of its annual art exhibits.

Although the Williams Mill was destroyed by fire for the final time in 1955, its legacy lives on. Historic photographs, postcards, paintings, and memories have preserved its image for future generations. More than seventy years after its disappearance, the Williams Mill remains one of Pontiac's most beloved landmarks and an enduring symbol of the city's rich history.

References

All references used in this story were identified at the point they were used in the story.

Recommended Reading

The Zoath Yost Family of Pontiac, Illinois by Dale C. Maley. This book includes more details about the Williams Mill being used for the annual local art exhibits by the Amitytown Society of Painters.

Websites

Most of the rare documents found in doing research for this book were uploaded to Archive.Org. One can search that website using the search term “Williams Mill” to find these documents. All documents may be viewed or downloaded from this website.

Author Spotlight

Dale C. Maley

One of Dale's hobbies is history, including the history of Fairbury, Illinois. Dale has written over 31 books on Fairbury and Livingston County history. He has also written over 400 history stories for the Fairbury Blade newspaper and FairburyNews.Net. He has given many history lectures to various community groups in Livingston, McLean, and Ford Counties. Dale is President of the Livingston County Historical Society and is President of the Fairbury Echoes Museum. Both Dale and his wife are 5th generation citizens of Fairbury.

Also by Dale C. Maley

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5. Fairbury History Stories Volume 1
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7. Fairbury History Stories Volume 3
8. Fairbury History Stories Volume 4
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10. Fairbury, Illinois Book Authors
11. Fairbury, Illinois from Prehistoric to Modern Times
12. Fairbury, Illinois in 1888
13. Fairbury, Illinois in the Civil War
14. Fairbury, Illinois in the World Wars
15. Franklin Oliver: Pioneer Settler of Livingston County, Illinois
16. History of Murders Committed in Fairbury, Illinois
17. History of the Livingston County Illinois Home & Community Education Organization
18. Honegger's & Co. of Fairbury, Illinois
19. Livingston County Historical Society: It's Beginning and Some Later Years with Updates
20. Ornamental Iron Artist Thomas F. Googerty from Pontiac, Illinois
21. The Great Chatsworth Train Wreck of 1887
22. The Founding of Fairbury, Illinois
23. The Goudy Bros. of Fairbury, Illinois
24. The Kring Family of Fairbury, Illinois
25. The McDowell Family of Fairbury, Illinois
26. The Massacre of the Nelson Buck Party from Pontiac, Illinois
27. The Story of the Jones House in Pontiac, Illinois
28. The Zoath Yost Family of Pontiac, Illinois
29. Walton Bros. of Fairbury, Illinois
30. William T. Stackpole of Fairbury, Illinois
31. William T. Stackpole's 1849 Journey from Illinois to the California Gold Fields

Investment Topic Books by Dale C. Maley

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2. Are Black Swans Really Harmful to Ordinary Investors?
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15. How Much Income Do I Really Need in Retirement?
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20. How to Read Your Way to Financial Wealth
21. How to Save and Invest for Retirement
22. How to Use Psychology to Achieve Your Financial Goals
23. How Would a Low-Cost Index Fund Approach Have Worked During the Great Depression?
24. Index Mutual Funds: How to Simplify Your Financial Life and Beat the Pros
25. Is Saving 10% of My Gross Income Good Enough?
26. My Journey to a Diversified Portfolio of Low-Cost Index Funds
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